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Controversies in Formative Shiʿi Islam

The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs

Mushegh Asatryan

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Controversies in Formative Shiʿi Islam

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Shiʿi Muslims, with their rich intellectual and cultural heritage, have contributed significantly to the fecundity and diversity of the Islamic traditions throughout the centuries, enabling Islam to evolve and flourish both as a major religion and also as a civilisation. In spite of this, Shiʿi Islam has received little scholarly attention in the West, either in medieval or modern times. It is only in recent decades that academic interest has focused increasingly on Shiʿi Islam within the wider study of Islam.

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Works published in this series include monographs, collective volumes, editions and translations of primary texts, and bibliographical projects, bringing together some of the most significant themes in the study of Shiʿi Islam through an interdisciplinary approach, and making them accessible to a wide readership.

To Hasmik,
Naneh and Artashes

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List of Abbreviations

BSOAS – Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EI2 – Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition
EI3 – Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition
EIr – Encyclopaedia Iranica
EIs – Encyclopaedia Islamica
EQ – Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan
IJMES – International Journal of Middle East Studies
JAOS – Journal of the American Oriental Society
JRAS – Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
ZDMG – Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

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Note on Transliteration and Usage

In transliterating Arabic and Persian, this book largely follows the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. However, for words that are used in English frequently, such as Imam, Mecca and Medina, the common English spelling is preferred. When discussing, paraphrasing and quoting translated passages from primary sources, the third-person masculine pronoun has been used in order to remain faithful to the Arabic original. The translations are original unless indicated otherwise. When transcribing passages in the Arabic original, the punctuation used in the editions is dispensed with. In the body of the text, both the Hijri and Gregorian dates are used, while in the bibliography and notes the Hijri ones are only indicated when they actually appear in the edition cited. Abdel Haleem's translation (Oxford, 2004) is used when quoting the Qurʾan in English, with modifications where needed.

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to push my boundaries and to question everything I read. Professor Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi has been a most encouraging colleague and friend, and my heartfelt thanks go to him for his illuminating advice and for the hours he spent discussing with me the intricacies of early Shiʿi thought over a cup of coffee.

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The delights of discovery are the author's alone, but the toils and anxieties of research and writing are equally shared by one's loved ones. No words can describe my gratitude to my family for being an endless source of joy and encouragement during these years: to my wife Hasmik, and to my children Naneh and Artashes, whose questions made me ponder the speed of snails and the distance between stars.

Introduction

Towards the middle of the 2nd/8th century a man named Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb al-Asadī declared the Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) to be God's incarnation on earth. He went on to claim that the Imam had appointed him as his representative or prophet. At first Jaʿfar tolerated him, but then, perhaps for political reasons, cursed and banished him.[1] Sometime later, in 138/755, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and a number of his followers raised a rebellion against the ʿAbbasid caliphate in the Iraqi town of Kufa but were defeated, and Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb was put to death by the governor of the city. The group associated with his name, the Khaṭṭābiyya, were accused of libertinism and reputedly professed other teachings unacceptable to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the majority Muslims, such as the transmigration of souls.[2]

Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb's rebellion was not an isolated incident in the early history of Islam, and his, by later Muslim standards, un-Islamic ideas were shared by many other individuals living in Iraq and mostly centred in Kufa. In fact, the first half of the 2nd/8th century was

[1] H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shīʿite Islam: Abū Jaʿfar ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shīʿite Thought* (Princeton, 1993), p. 21; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power: Interpretations and Implications of the Miracle in Early Imamism', in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London, 2011), pp. 219–221; for a discussion of the possible reasons for Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's curse of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, see idem, 'Kaṭṭābiya', *EIr*.

[2] On Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and the Khaṭṭābiyya, see Amir-Moezzi, 'Kaṭṭābiya', *EIr*; Wilferd Madelung, 'Khaṭṭābiyya', *EI2*; Hassan Ansari, 'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb', *EIs*; R. Buckley, 'The Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and the Abbasids', *Der Islam*, 79 (2002), pp. 118–140; the main accounts of the Khaṭṭābiyya are found in al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 37–38, 58–60; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 10–11; Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), pp. 50–52, 54–55, 63–64.

punctuated by revolts led by charismatic individuals, who regarded their contemporary Shiʿi imams either as divine incarnations or as gods, while reserving for themselves the role of messengers on behalf of the manifest imam to the rest of humankind.[3] Some of these extremists shared the Khaṭṭābiyya's belief in the redundancy of formal acts of worship and in the metaphorical interpretation of prohibitions, and believed that the souls of human beings were reborn into other, human or sub-human, forms. Some of them also taught that God's first creations were 'shadows and apparitions' (*aẓilla wa-ashbāḥ*), and that God had created seven worlds and placed in each of them an Adam and his progeny.[4]

All these rebellions were eventually crushed, the participants scattered or killed. The beliefs that had inspired them, however, lived on, were put into writing and further elaborated. For their 'extreme' adoration of some members of the Prophet Muhammad's family, the people who held these beliefs were branded as 'extremists' (from the Arabic *ghulāt*, sg. *ghālin*, henceforth, Ghulat and Ghali) by later Shiʿi and Sunni authors.[5] In response, the Ghulat derisively called their critics 'shortcomers' (Ar. *muqaṣṣira*, sg. *muqaṣṣir*), for 'falling short' of recognising the true, divine or semi-divine nature of the Prophet and his offspring (henceforth to be referred to as 'moderates').

During the 2nd/8th century, these 'extremists' formed an integral part of the Muslim community of Iraq, and initially they coexisted

[3] On the Ghulat revolts of the early 2nd/8th century, see W. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shīʿite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (Cambridge, 2008).

[4] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 7–8; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq* (Beirut, 1402/1982), p. 230; al-Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil al-imāma*, ed. Josef van Ess (Beirut, 1981), p. 37 (Arabic pagination); al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 31; H. Halm, 'Das "Buch der Schatten": Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums', II, *Der Islam*, 58 (1981), pp. 16–17; P. Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 208–215.

[5] For a discussion of the term, see W. al-Qāḍī, 'The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya', in Etan Kohlberg, ed., *Shīʿism* (Burlington, VT, 2003), pp. 295–319; for the most up-to-date study of the term, see S. Anthony, 'Ghulāt', *EI3* (forthcoming; I am grateful to the author for sharing with me an unpublished version of the article).

peacefully with those who did not share their ideas.[6] At this period of Islamic history when the broader and now familiar divisions had not yet emerged, by contrast the Ghulat already possessed a clear communal identity. They formulated a coherent religious worldview and produced a sizeable corpus of literature.

During the 3rd/9th century the difficult relationship between the Ghulat and the 'moderates' was exacerbated, becoming even more strained in its final years. The death of the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, in 260/874 and the disappearance of his infant son, the twelfth Imam Muḥammad al-Mahdī, created a crisis of authority in the Imāmīẓ community. Al-Mahdīẓwas declared to be in hiding, awaiting a time to return, and with no apparent legitimate successor to al-ʿAskarī, a series of different people came forward claiming to be in contact with the hidden Imam al-Mahdī, among whom were several representatives of the Ghulat. The claims of these 'extremists' were (sometimes violently) repudiated, and the control of the Shiʿi community passed to four successive 'delegates' (*sufarāʾ*, sg. *safīr*), who managed the affairs of the community on behalf of al-Mahdī.[7] Becoming now yet more marginalised, and perhaps giving in to pressure, a branch of the Ghulat left Iraq for Syria, taking with them many of their writings. They became known as the Nuṣayrīs (*nuṣayriyyūn*) after Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr (d. after 254/868), one of their leaders who claimed to be the 'Gate' (*bāb*) of the hidden Imam. In Syria the Nuṣayrīs found a safe haven, and were able to preserve and further develop the written heritage of their Iraqi Ghulat predecessors. It is thanks to them that most of the Ghulat writings currently available have come down to us.

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[6] Cf. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', p. 216; idem, 'Al-Ṣaffâr al-Qummî (m. 290/902–3) et son *Kitâb Baṣâ'ir al-Darajât*', *Journal Asiatique*, 280 (1992), pp. 235–236.

[7] These delegates were, in order of succession, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī, Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtīẓ and ʿAlīẓ b. Muḥammad al-Sammarī; on this period of Shiʿi history, see H. Abdulsater, 'Dynamics of Absence: Twelver Shiʿism during the Minor Occultation', *ZDMG*, 161 (2011), pp. 305–334; S. Arjomand, 'The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shiism: A Sociohistorical Perspective', *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 502–509; Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 71–98.

After this period, and along with the crystallisation of a dominant, Twelver version of Shiʿism,[8] the remnants of the Ghulat in Iraq became even less significant. Some of their beliefs did make it into the Twelver canon,[9] but their original writings disappeared from the Shiʿi mainland. The study of the history of the Ghulat has therefore been hampered by the paucity of their original writings. Testimonies in 'external' sources such as heresiographies, chronicles and biographical dictionaries (*rijāl* works) are not only limited and formulaic but polemical, and as a result some scholars have viewed these with due caution.[10] The first two published works written by the Ghulat themselves, on the other hand, were compilations consisting of many layers of additions, and thus what little 'internal' material has reached modern scholars is extremely hard to date and contextualise. The first of these texts was *Umm al-kitāb*, a multi-layered work the central part of which was probably composed late in the 3rd/9th or early in the 4th/10th century, and which survives in an archaic Persian translation.[11] The next one, published in 1960, is another compilation of at least eleven layers entitled *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla*, its various parts composed between the 2nd/3rd and the 5th/11th centuries in Iraq and Syria.[12] The publication of these texts was followed by several

[8] E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya', *BSOAS*, 39 (1976), pp. 521–534.

[9] Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 42–43; Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', pp. 216–217; idem, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, tr. David Streight (Albany, 1994), pp. 42, 171, n. 214; see also Chapter 2, the subsection entitled '*The Authorship and Dating of the* "aẓilla *Group*" '.

[10] For a study of external sources on the Ghulat, see R. Buckley, 'The Early Shiite Ghulāh', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 42 (1997), pp. 301–310; H. Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* (Zurich, 1982), pp. 27–31; W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam*, 42 (1967), pp. 37–52, English tr. in Kohlberg, *Shiʿism*, pp. 153–167; for a source-critical study of heresiographic depictions of the Ghulat, see T. Bayhom-Daou, 'The Second Century Shīʿite *Ġulāt*: Were they Really Gnostic?', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 5 (2003), pp. 13–61.

[11] This work was published by Wladimir Ivanow in *Der Islam*, 23 (1936), pp. 1–132; on its dating see S. Anthony, 'The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*', *JRAS*, 21 (2011), pp. 1–30.

[12] Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla*, ed. ʿĀrif Tāmir and Ignace Khalifé (Beirut, 1960); several further editions of the text assembled from different manuscripts have been published by Tāmir and by Muṣṭafā Ghālib. This monograph

studies dedicated particularly to them.[13] More general studies about the Ghulat, however, were inevitably based on external sources, such as heresiographies, biographical dictionaries and Shiʿi *ḥadīth*, focusing both on individual 'extremists', Ghulat groups or movements[14] and broader histories of the Ghulat.[15]

Two more Ghulat texts, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *Kitāb al-usūs*,[16] were published in the latter half of the 20th century (in 1995 and 2000 respectively). But a breakthrough in our knowledge of Ghulat literature and thought became possible after the publication of a series of twelve volumes entitled *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*. Published between 2006 and 2013, this work purported to be, as the title indicates, a collection of primary texts of the ʿAlawīs (a modern appellation for the Nuṣayrīs, this term should not be used in

uses the version published by Tāmir (Beirut, 1401/1981) as it is the only one with a useful index. Still, there are no significant differences between the texts of the various editions, and the division into chapters is the same in all. Therefore, references to *Kitāb al-haft* indicate the chapter as well as the page number, so that they may be tracked across the various editions. Hereinafter this edition will be referred to as *KH*.

[13] On *Umm al-kitāb*, see 'Notes sur l'"Ummu'l-kitab" des Ismaëliens de l'Asie Centrale', *Revue des Études Islamiques* (1932), pp. 419–482; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 113–198; on *Kitāb al-haft*, see Halm, ibid., pp. 240–274 and Halm, 'Das "Buch der Schatten"' [I and II], *Der Islam*, 55 (1978), pp. 219–266 and *Der Islam*, 58 (1981), pp. 16–86; for a brief note on *Kitāb al-haft*, see F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), p. 163.

[14] See S. Wasserstrom, 'The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra ibn Saʿīd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of its Rejection', *History of Religions*, 25 (1985), pp. 1–29; Amir-Moezzi, 'Kaṭṭabiya', *EIr*; Madelung, 'Khaṭṭābiyya', *EI2*; Ansari, 'Abūl-Khaṭṭāb', *EIs*; E. Kohlberg, 'Muḥammadiyya', *EI2*; see also several other entries on Ghulat groups in *EI2* by Wilferd Madelung.

[15] Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 19–51; M. H. Gerami, *Nakhustīn munāsibāt-i fikrī-yi tashayyuʿ: bāzkhānī-yi mafhūm-i ghuluww dar andīsha-yi jarayānhā-yi mutaqaddim-i imāmī* (Tehran, 2012); M. Hodgson, 'How did the Early Shīʿa Become Sectarian?', *JAOS*, 75 (1955), pp. 4–8, reprinted in Kohlberg, *Shiʿism*, pp. 3–15; idem, 'Ghulāt', *EI2*; Buckley, 'The Early Shiite Ghulāh', pp. 301–325; Tucker, *Mahdis*; H. Halm, 'Ġolāt', *EIr*.

[16] L. Capezzone, ed., 'Il Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ attribuito a Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar al-Juʿfī', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 69 (1995), pp. 295–416; *Kitāb al-Ṣirāṭ* was published for a second time by al-Munṣif b. ʿAbd al-Jalīl in Beirut in 2004 from the same manuscript, and this book uses his edition; *Kitāb al-usūs* was published as part of *Madkhal ilā al-madhhab al-ʿalawī al-nuṣayrī* by Jaʿfar al-Kanj Dandashī (Irbid, Jordan, 2000), pp. 73–156.

connection with the Alevis of Turkey).[17] Apart from a large number of both previously known and new writings by Nuṣayrīżauthors, the collection contains several complete treatises by individuals from the Kufan Ghulat community, as well as countless fragments from other works cited either in these Ghulat texts or in the works of Nuṣayrī authors. These complete treatises and fragments include texts that have already been published (such as *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*), ones that were known only by their titles (such as *Kitāb al-marātib wa'l-daraj* and Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*),[18] and ones that were entirely unknown (such as *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*).[19] The last published original Ghulat text was *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*, found in two manuscripts in the collection of the Institute of Ismaili Studies.[20]

The newly revealed Ghulat texts enable scholars to study Ghulat cosmology first hand, without relying solely on heresiographic

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[17] Abūż Mūsāż and Shaykh Mūsā, ed., *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, 12 vols (Lebanon, 2006–2013); some of the titles published in it are mentioned in L. Massignon's 'Esquisse d'une bibliographie Nusayrie', in his *Opera Minora*, ed. Youakim Moubarac (Paris, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 640–649. For an introduction to the ʿAlawīs of Syria and their beliefs see S. Procházka, 'The Alawis', in *The Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton et al., published on-line September 2015.

[18] Al-Masʿūdīżand several other authors indicated that Isḥāq al-Aḥmar wrote a book with this title; and, in fact, some of its passages have been preserved in the works of Nuṣayrīżauthors. Taking these passages and al-Masʿūdī's testimony as evidence, Yaron Friedman, in his *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: an Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden, 2010), p. 244, mistakenly regards it as identical to the aforementioned *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* by the pseudo-Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī; a comparison of the latter work with the surviving passages of Isḥāq's text, however, reveal that they have nothing in common. A similar view is expressed by Capezzone in the introduction to his edition of the pseudo-Mufaḍḍal's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 302–305. For the fragments of Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* see *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, ed. Abūż Mūsāż and Shaykh Mūsāż (Lebanon, 2006), vol. 1, p. 211, vol. 2, pp. 197–198, 200, vol. 4, pp. 23, 40, 53, 135, 138, 141, 165, 167–168, 169–170, 258; the testimony of al-Masʿūdīż and other authors will be discussed in Chapter 2; briefly on Isḥāq and his works, see M. Asatryan, 'Esḥāq Aḥmar Naḳaʿi', *EIr*; *Kitāb al-marātib wa'l-daraj* is preserved in fragments in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 1, pp. 216, 230, vol. 2, pp. 184–190, vol. 4, pp. 82–87, 101, 118, 290–291, 306–307.

[19] This treatise is published in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 261–287.

[20] MSS 140 and 511 of the Institute; for a study, critical edition and translation of the text, see M. Asatryan, 'An Early Shīʿi Cosmology: *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa l-aẓilla* and its Milieu', *Studia Islamica*, 110 (2015), pp. 1–80.

descriptions. Still, utilising them requires a great deal of caution. As with the previously available texts, neither the dating nor the authorship of these writings is readily apparent as their claims of attribution are often apocryphal. For example, more than one Ghulat text has been attributed to the famous 2nd/8th century 'extremist' Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, but upon close scrutiny it becomes apparent that despite their overall similarity, these texts could not possibly have been written by the same person.[21] Furthermore, the statement of authorship in many cases consists of a chain of authorities, who are said to have reported the text on the authority of a single well-known personality, such as Mufaḍḍal, the text itself consisting of the words of one of the Imams, usually Jaʿfar al-Ṣadiq. So, it often remains unclear which, if any, of the listed authorities is the actual author. It also remains unclear what the 'transmission' of a text through a chain of authorities might have been like.[22] In the case of a brief *ḥadīth* report an oral transmission is plausible, but even then the text is eventually recorded and continues its life in written form.[23] In the case of a long treatise an oral transmission is far less likely, suggesting it was either composed and circulated in written form from the outset, or circulated in shorter fragments, then collected together to form one text. In both cases it remains unclear which, if any, of the

[21] The individual texts attributed to Mufaḍḍal will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3; for a brief overview of these writings, see M. Asatryan, 'Mofa al al-Joʿfi', in *EIr*; see also H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 333–337.

[22] Friedman uses the term 'transmission' to indicate the survival of Ghulat traditions and texts among the Nuṣayrīs, and when referring to the *isnād*s appended to them, but he takes its meaning as self-evident and does not explain what this transmission might have actually been like, or whether these transmission chains can be regarded as lists of the actual people who passed the text from generation to generation (although he discounts some of them as 'fabrications', in most cases he does not question their authenticity), see his *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 6, 19, 243, 246, 249 n. 37; he refers to Halm's 'Das "Buch der Schatten"', [II], for 'a detailed explanation of the transmission of the Ghulāt traditions', but Halm's article, too, does not provide any concrete answers to these questions.

[23] On this, see M. Dakake, 'Writing and Resistance: the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Early Shiʿism', in Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, ed., *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law* (London, 2014), pp. 181–201.

listed individuals is the actual author or who is the author of which part, and what the role of the remaining names might be.

Finally, at times a text is preceded by a chain of transmitters some of whom then appear in the text and are referred to in the third person. Such, for example, is *Kitāb al-akwār al-nūrāniyya*, which, among others, lists as transmitters of the text Isḥāq al-Aḥmar and Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr who are then portrayed in the text itself as fierce rivals.[24] The texts surviving in fragments, such as *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-kursī,* are even more problematic. Not only do both of them survive is numerous fragments scattered around in different texts, but many of the fragments of the former survive as unacknowledged quotations in the latter, thus forming quotations within quotations.[25]

Before embarking on a study of the content and context of the Ghulat literature and of their history, one therefore needs to undertake a great deal of spade-work: in order to determine as far and as much as is possible the authorship of surviving works; to propose a rough dating for others; or simply to separate one text from another. One of the four goals of this book, therefore, is precisely this: to disentangle these texts from one another and to present a rough timeframe of their composition and circulation. The second goal, which will be pursued in parallel to the first, is to place the development of the Ghulat literature in the larger context of early Islamic history. The third goal is to outline the Ghulat cosmology as reconstructed from these sources. The fourth, and perhaps the most intriguing goal of this book, is to understand the nature of the Ghulat community: their social world, their relationship with the larger society of Muslims, and their view of themselves within it; to see whether the Ghulat constituted a small, esoteric group with strongly guarded boundaries, or just a loose group of individuals connected by shared ideas about the world. And although it is now possible to present approximate answers to these questions, the chapter that deals with them is the shortest: because the

[24] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār al-nūrāniyya wa'l-adwār al-rūḥāniyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 1, pp. 68, 75, 91.

[25] On the relationship between the two texts, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature Between Iraq and Syria: The *Book of Shadows* and the History of the Early Ghulat', in Tzvi Langermann and Robert Morrison, ed., *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean* (University Park, 2016), pp. 131–135.

writings of the Ghulat offer few (and mostly indirect) answers to them, and because references to the Ghulat in external sources are formulaic and scant.

Thus, the thirty-six original Ghulat texts now available are a confusing motley of anonymous treatises, many-layered compilations and fragments, both large and small, cited in larger works which, in their own turn, have uncertain origins. To find some way of tackling this mass, and to lay the groundwork for further discussion, this study will begin with one of the most complicated texts, *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla*. An analysis of *Kitāb al-haft* reveals that it can be divided into eleven separate textual layers, at least three of which are anonymous quotations from other Ghulat texts, while later Ghulat and Nuṣayrīż texts quote parts of it in great abundance.

The first chapter of this study is the most philological as it is primarily concerned with a close textual study of *Kitāb al-haft*: by using internal textual markers and external evidence, it divides *Kitāb al-haft* into its various layers. Other than a study of a major Ghulat treatise, this part will serve as an entry into the larger world of the literature of Shiʿi 'extremists', firstly by serving as a case-study of how Ghulat texts were compiled and how they related to one another. Secondly, this book will be traced in later Ghulat and Nuṣayrīż literature as a means for delving deeper into the historical context in which these other texts were written and circulated. Thus, in some of the subsequent chapters, fragments of *Kitāb al-haft* will be traced in later writings, on each occasion stepping back to study the larger historical context of these fragments and their 'host' texts.

Most of the remaining chapters combine philological groundwork with historical contextualisation. Chapter 2 discusses the wider Ghulat milieu, where the earliest parts of *Kitāb al-haft* and related writings were written and read. Making use of heresiographies, biographical dictionaries and *ḥadīth*, it examines the earliest known Ghulat authors and their writings. It also studies the larger group of Ghulat writings which share some key similarities with some of the layers of *Kitāb al-haft*. Because one of their shared features is a focus on the notion of the primordial *aẓilla* ('shadows') and *ashbāḥ* ('apparitions'), they will be called collectively the '*aẓilla* Group'. Through the use of clues in external sources, a rough timeframe and geographical location for the composition of this group of texts is constructed.

Chapters 3 and 4 study traces of *Kitāb al-haft* in later Ghulat and Nuṣayrīẓwritings. The third chapter examines two texts, purportedly composed by Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr and written in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century, which contain direct and indirect traces of *Kitāb al-haft*. Having closely studied these traces, the focus is then turned on the larger Ghulat environment where they were composed. The broader literature circulating in Ghulat circles of the time and the themes it discusses are investigated. In particular, the reflection in the texts of two historical processes taking place in the Ghulat community of the time is studied. One is the worsening of the relationship between the Ghulat and the *muqaṣṣira* and the ensuing polemics between the two groups; the second is the crisis of authority within the Imāmīẓ Shiʿi community after the death of the eleventh Imam, and the attempts by some of the Ghulat to fill the vacuum.

Chapter 4 traces the manifestations of *Kitāb al-haft* in Nuṣayrī literature in the 4th/10th century and beyond. Through this, it investigates the broader context of the transmission of Ghulat texts from Iraq to Syria in this period, and, broader still, the process of the migration of its authors and readers. Although this process is hardly touched upon in the primary sources, tracing the migration of Ghulat texts provides interesting insights into the peregrinations of the people who wrote and read them. In Syria, the Nuṣayrīs preserved the Ghulat written lore and built on it further. Through studying the circulation of Ghulat texts as part of Nuṣayrīẓliterature, some of the problems faced by the Nuṣayrīs in Syria are considered. The chapter concludes with a look at the later trajectory of Ghulat literature, by tracing the history of some of its manuscripts.

Individual texts having been disentangled from one another, insofar as is possible, and a broad framework for their composition and circulation having been proposed, the fifth chapter presents a survey of Ghulat doctrines as revealed in their own writings. Despite the peculiarities of individual texts, the Ghulat corpus exhibits a surprising degree of uniformity in its teachings and vocabulary, and the focus here is on the several broad themes recurring in most of these texts.

The concluding chapter begins with a summary of the material presented in the preceding five regarding the history of the writings and the teachings of the Ghulat. Leaving aside the history of ideas and texts, it focuses on their authors and readers, going beyond the veil of

cosmologies and textual history, and using these to shed light on the social world of the Ghulat. Direct references to this are few, but a close reading of a number of passages, combined with a study of the contours of the Ghulat cosmos as a whole, are informative regarding the Ghulat's attempts to define themselves as a distinct community, and to see themselves as a separate group amid a larger society of Muslims. The findings from these are buttressed through an examination of the internal logic and history of the Ghulat's written corpus, and situated in the broader context of early Islamic history.

A few words on the use of terminology are in order. The plural 'Ghulat' and the singular 'Ghali' (used interchangeably with 'extremist/s') will refer to those Shiʿis who lived in Iraq between the 2nd and 3rd/8th and 9th centuries, and who for some of their views were branded as 'extremists' (*ghulāt*) by Shiʿi as well as Sunni authors. These beliefs (which are elaborated in detail in Chapter 5) included the view that the Imams and/or the Prophet Muhammad were divine or semi-divine beings; the idea that human beings could be reborn into other human or sub-human bodies; the notion that Muslim rituals and prohibitions were redundant for the elect amongst them; and a particular mythology of the creation. The term 'moderates' will refer to those Shiʿis who actively opposed and criticised the Ghulat, and whom the Ghulat in their turn berated for their failure to follow the 'true' path. The majority of the Shiʿis who acknowledged a line of the Imams up to Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874), and who did not subscribe to the ideas of the Ghulat, will be referred to as 'Imāmīs'.[26] Those Shiʿis who, following the death of the eleventh Imam and the disappearance of the twelfth, formulated a doctrine of Twelve Imams, thereafter developing into the dominant branch of Shiʿi Islam, will be referred to by the term 'Twelvers'. And the term 'Imāmīs' will be used in referring to the broader tradition that comprised both the Imāmīs and the Twelvers.

[26] The contours of the Imāmī community during the lifetime of the Imams are far from clear, but for the purposes of the forthcoming discussion the above definition is sufficient; for a discussion of the terminology see N. Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 14–17.

1

Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla: a Textual Analysis

The Ghulat Corpus

The Ghulat produced a sizeable corpus of writings during the 2nd and 3rd centuries of Islam. Many of these writings are lost or unknown to scholarship, due either to the fact that they were actually lost or destroyed or because they have been kept hidden from outsiders. Many survived, however, thanks to the Nuṣayrīs who emigrated from Iraq to Syria in the 4th/10th century, taking with them a large number of the Ghulat texts. This is why Nuṣayrīsources are full of passages from works attributed to 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th century Ghulat personalities, detailing beliefs hitherto only fragmentarily known to us from heresiographic sources. A Syrian Nuṣayrīauthor of the late 4th/10th century owned a library of 150 volumes of 'esoteric monotheism' (*al-tawḥīd al-bāṭin*, most likely a reference to the teachings of the Nuṣayrīs)[1] and 250 volumes of 'the teachings of the Mukhammisa (*takhmīs*), the Pentadists, the teachings of delegation (*tafwīḍ*), the teachings of the moderates (*taqṣīr*) and works of exoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-ẓāhir*)'.[2] Later on, in the 6th/12th century, certain Nuṣayrīcentres in Syria were conquered or purchased by the Nizārī Ismailis,[3] who then preserved much of the Nuṣayrīand the earlier Ghulat written heritage they found in them. Hence, the currently

[1] That this term refers to Nuṣayrīeachings may be understood from the fact that the Nuṣayrīs called themselves *ahl al-tawḥīd* (monotheists, lit. 'people of divine unicity'), see Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawīs*, p. 11, and because it is the largest single group of books.

[2] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqā'iq asrār al-dīn*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-'Alawī*, vol. 4, p. 12.

[3] N. Mirza, *Syrian Ismailism: the Ever Living Line of the Imamate, AD 1100–1260* (Richmond, 1997), p. 14.

extant Ghulat texts are either whole treatises surviving in collections of Ismaili manuscripts, such as *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*,[4] or fragments quoted in Nuṣayrī writings (listed in full in the appendix).

Neither the dating and attribution of individual Ghulat texts nor their relationship to one another, are readily apparent. Still, they share a number of features suggesting a common milieu of production and circulation, as well as a common later history. Thus, all of the available writings have a shared inventory of cosmological and theological themes and a shared vocabulary, all of which recurs from one treatise to another. Some texts even use the same Qurʾanic verses to illustrate similar ideas.[5] For example, Q. 17:50–51, {Be stone or iron or any other substance you think hard to bring to life}, is used in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, *Kitāb al-haft* and al-Qummī's heresiography in the discussion of transformation into non-human forms (*maskh* and *raskh*). Q. 56:10–11, {Those in front – ahead indeed! For these will be the ones brought nearest to God}, is used in two texts in the discussion of two related questions: *Kitāb al-ḥujub* states that some believers rank higher in the spiritual hierarchy due to their precedence in responding to God's call;[6] while *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* explains that creatures are arranged in the seven heavens according to the order of their creation.[7] In describing those who falsely claim kinship with ʿAlī and Muhammad, finally, *Kitāb al-ṣirāt* and, according to al-Qummī, the Mukhammisa, the followers of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and Bashshār al-Shaʿīrī, used verse eighteen of the fifth sura of the Qurʾan:[8] {The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones'. Say, 'Then why does He punish you for your sins?'}.

Of course not all the themes recur in all the texts, though a close examination of some of them reveals particular common thematic patterns and the understanding of an overall thematic and stylistic unity in the corpus can be upheld. Finally, many texts quote one

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[4] For more detail, see Chapter 4.

[5] See *Kitāb al–ṣirāṭ*, pp. 147 and 197; *Kitāb al-haft*, ch. 61, p. 161; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 58–59.

[6] *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 55.

[7] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 35 (because the critical edition and translation of this text is divided into paragraphs, in referring to it, I will use paragraphs rather than page numbers).

[8] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 164; Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 60.

another or anonymously incorporate parts of each other. This means that not only were they written by authors with shared beliefs who did not mind borrowing each other's formulations, but that they circulated in a milieu where individual writers drew on a common pool of available texts, which they copied freely in their own writings. At the same time, the authors were probably reluctant to show these texts to anyone who was not a member of their community. For the Ghulat writings share yet another feature – there is a virtual absence (but for a few exceptions) of any mention of them in external sources,[9] which suggests that this literature was produced only for internal consumption and was with reluctance, if at all, shown to outsiders. Due to this unity, henceforth the entirety of Ghulat writings produced in the 2nd–3rd/8th–9th centuries will be referred to as 'the Ghulat corpus' or 'the Corpus' (without quotations marks).

The authorship and dates of Ghulat texts are not easily determined as the attributions they provide are rarely trustworthy. Often one and the same author is attributed to texts that diverge sufficiently to suggest separate authorship. Or one and the same treatise is sometimes an assemblage of different texts composed at different periods. Secondly, the criteria of attribution are often unclear, as a text may claim to be not only 'by' so and so but also 'narrated on the authority' of so and so, such as *Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-ḥujub*;[10] some are prefaced by a lengthy chain of transmission or *isnād*, leaving it uncertain who wrote down the final text, who was its originator, or whether the *isnād* makes any sense at all. Finally, some texts have no attribution at all.

Nevertheless, there are clues, both internal to the Corpus and external, that allow for an approximate periodisation of the texts of which it is comprised. The internal clues are the quotations and anonymous citations of some Ghulat texts by others, allowing one to determine in what order some of them were written. The external ones

[9] Several works with the title *Kitāb al-aẓilla* are cited by al-Najāshī, Shaykh Mufīd mentions *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*, and al-Masʿūdī and several other authors write about Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*; al-Najāshī mentions *Kitāb al-mamdūḥīn wa'l-madhmūmīn* among the writings of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān, which is noted by al-Najāshī; for all the references, see below. Other than these titles, I have been unable to locate any of the titles of original Ghulat texts in external sources. I will discuss these instances later on.

[10] On this text, see later in this chapter, the section on the '*aẓilla* Group'.

are the very few mentions of Ghulat treatises and their authors in non-Ghulat sources and, more importantly, the occurrence of the teachings found in the Corpus in more easily datable texts, such as heresiographies and *ḥadīth*.

These clues notwithstanding, a cursory reading of the Corpus leaves an impression of a disparate collection of themes, plots and terminology, recurring from one text to another, together with a series of names purporting to be those of the authors of passages or of entire treatises. To write a history of the entire, currently surviving, Ghulat Corpus would require – over and above extensive philological groundwork and historical contextualisation – more space and time than this monograph would allow. And even then, many of the conclusions as to precise dating and authorship would be tentative, given the nature of the material and the scarcity of sources.

In order to bring some order to this unwieldy mass of material without having to consider each separate surviving text and fragment, the Corpus will be looked at through the lens of a 'biography' of a single work. The history of its compilation and circulation will be considered by examining its connection to other writings of the Corpus and beyond, and by placing it in the larger context of the history of the Ghulat and their literature. Apart from being a study in its own right, this will serve as means to investigating the broader textual and religious environment in which traces of it can be found.

The book is *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla*, and it stands out from other writings of the Corpus for two reasons. Firstly, it consists of at least eleven textual layers composed and compiled between the 2nd–5th/8th–11th centuries, thus encompassing some three centuries of Ghulat (and Nuṣayrī) literary production. Secondly, it incorporates fragments from several other texts, most of which belong to the Corpus, but some of which reflect traces of Ismaili influence. The investigation of this treatise in its broader literary and religious context will thus provide a focused case-study for understanding the emergence, circulation and transmission of the entire Ghulat corpus, and its connections to other literary traditions in early Islam. Furthermore, the biography of *Kitāb al-haft* as seen in this broader context may help us to better understand the history of its authors and readers as well. The first step is to begin to disengage the various layers of *Kitāb al-haft* from one another.

Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla: an Introduction

In all of its presently available editions *Kitāb al-haft* consists of sixty-seven chapters and contains discussions of most of the known doctrines espoused by the Shiʿi 'extremists'. Almost all the chapters take the form of a dialogue between the Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, where the latter asks questions and the Imam answers. Most of them discuss various cosmological ideas, comment on Qurʾanic verses, or narrate myths and anecdotes about the Imams, while some consist of *ḥadīth*.

The style of various chapters is uneven, and some contradict others. Thus, while some chapters exhibit clear markers connecting them to one or more others and express similar ideas on certain cosmological details, others have diametrically opposed views on the same subject, and are written in divergent styles. This in itself is a clear indication that the text is a compilation consisting of more than one textual layer. The first scholar to note this fact was Heinz Halm, who divided the book into two parts, the first consisting of Chapters 1–59 which, he held, were probably by a well-known 'extremist', Muḥammad b. Sinān (d. 220/835); and a later one, comprising the final eight chapters and the Introduction, and appended, in Halm's view, by a later NuṣayrīĞ 'editor'.[11] Halm further notes that the earlier layer, too, does not seem to be uniform. However, he does not elaborate much on the structure of the text or on the differences between its layers, and much less does he discuss the divisions in the earlier layer, treating it instead as a single entity when reconstructing the theology of *Kitāb al-haft*,[12] and calling it a 'firm kernel of the text'.[13]

Heinz Halm's attribution of what he calls the oldest layer to Muḥammad b. Sinān is problematic and will be discussed below in

[11] Halm, 'Das "'Buch der Schatten"', [I], pp. 236–241 and [II], pp. 66–67 and his *Gnosis*, p. 242. Halm's argument indicates that he considers Chapters 59 to 67 later additions because they consist entirely of *ḥadīth*, see "Das ʿBuch der Schatten'" II, p. 66. This is not the case, however, for only the last three chapters consist of traditions. Still, his implication that the last eight chapters were added later is correct, but for different reasons, which will be discussed below.

[12] Halm, 'Das "Buch der Schatten"', [II], pp. 67–71.

[13] Halm, ibid., p. 66. In a footnote, however, he acknowledges that this layer itself might be the product of more than one author (note 203).

greater detail.[14] And a close reading of *Kitāb al-haft* raises still more questions. It turns out that what he calls the 'firm kernel' is itself not all that firm. For one thing, a large number of the chapters stand out from the rest due to their themes, style and vocabulary. For another, several theological ideas are not presented in a consistent manner throughout. Finally, and most importantly, some of *Kitāb al-haft*'s chapters are copied from other (now published) Ghulat texts. All of the above indicates accretions to an initial core of the text, or, if such a 'core' did not exist, a compilation of many fragments.

Before beginning to dissect *Kitāb al-haft*, a definition of terms is in order. 'Layer' indicates parts of *Kitāb al-haft* that have been added as separate units. These may be of four types. First, a chunk of text which is consistent enough in its content and style to indicate a single author. Second, a chunk of text that may have figured as a separate textual unit before being added to the book, even if potentially it could have been written by more than one author. The third type denotes a loose collection of textual units which, even when potentially written by more than one person, exhibit a shared core of religious ideas, or are written in a markedly distinct style, thereby standing in contrast to other parts of the text. The fourth type is an (anonymous) quotation from another known text. Following these definitions then, at this stage of our knowledge, *Kitāb al-haft* can be divided into at least eleven textual layers, at least three of which are quotations from other texts. This classification is not final, of course, and discoveries of more texts may allow for further dissection.

A Note on the Editions

Kitāb al-haft was first published by ʿĀrif Tāmir and Ignace Khalifé in 1960, under the title *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓillat*, from a manuscript found among Ismaili works in the Masyaf region in Syria.[15] In 1964, MuṣṭafāﷺGhālib published the same work under a slightly different

[14] Ibid., p. 67.

[15] The edition has been reviewed, along with a brief discussion of the work's authorship and context, by Madelung in *Der Islam*, 38 (1963), pp. 180–182. See also *GAS*, vol. 1: 534; Ā. B. Tihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa fī taṣānīf al-shīʿa* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 25, p. 237.

title, *Kitāb al-haft al-sharīf*, based on three manuscripts, one of which the editor said he found among Ismaili writings in the Salamiyya region of Syria.[16] The text was also published in the series *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* in 2006, in the collection of works attributed to Mufaḍḍal, also under the title *Kitāb al-haft al-sharīf*, but the editors do not specify whether it is based on manuscripts or on one of the previous editions.[17] In 1981 Tāmir published the text once again, this time based on a manuscript from the Qadmus region in Syria, which had been copied in Masyaf in the year 1117/1705.[18] The text of this edition seems to be almost identical to the 1960 edition, and together these two differ only in minor details from Ghālib's edition.

Since none of the editions is perfect,[19] the latest one is used as it is the only one with a useful index. Where Ghālib's version seems more accurate, however, his edition is referred to; in the references, '*KH*' will specifically refer to Tāmir's 1981 edition of *Kitāb al-haft*, while 'Ghālib' will refer to Ghālib's edition. Since the number of chapters and their contents are the same in all editions, in addition to referring to the page numbers of the 1981 edition, the chapter number will often be given as well, to allow for references to be tracked across other editions as well.

Layer 1: Chapters 1–8

The first layer of *Kitāb al-haft* consists of Chapters 1 to 8 and it exhibits the greatest thematic and formal coherence. Beginning with the creation of the world and ending with God's covenant with which the creation concludes, these chapters form a continuous storyline and all exhibit distinct textual markers that demonstrate a continuity between its parts. The three that follow, Chapters 9 to 11, do not have anything that contradicts the subject-matter of the first layer, but because they lack explicit textual features tying them to the initial eight chapters the question of their membership of this layer is left open.

[16] He does not mention the provenance of the first, and the third manuscript is the same as the one used by Tāmir and Khalifé. He reprinted it in 1977.

[17] *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 4, pp. 289–423.

[18] Reprinted in 2007.

[19] Some of the first edition's mistakes and shortcomings are discussed in Madelung's review, p. 182.

What now follows is a description of the textual markers connecting the first eight chapters of *Kitāb al-haft*.

Chapter 1 tells how God created the world and all that is in it, and ends with the statement that this 'continued for fifty thousand years'.[20] The chapter that follows begins with 'then in each heaven God created a Paradise',[21] suggesting a narrative continuity between the two. The connection between Chapters 2 and 3 is more straightforward: the former ends with the statement that after the apparitions and shadows had learned what God taught them, 'He began telling them how He had created the dark (*ẓulmāniyya*), that is, material bodies, and how He had created the demons.'[22] The next chapter begins with a paraphrase of this statement and a continuation of the same story: 'When they understood that, He began telling the denizens of each heaven how He had created the dark (*ẓulmāniyya*) bodies,[23] how He had created the demons, and how He had made them and brought them together, and how He created the night, so that they may rest in it.' Chapter 4 ends with a description of how, after God had hidden himself from the people as a punishment for their disobedience, having lost their proximity to Him and the sight of Him they felt lonely, remained perplexed, were unable to find the right path for their actions and felt sorrow and regret;[24] and Chapter 5 opens with a solution to this perplexity: 'When they felt perplexed and bewildered and felt regret, God felt mercy towards them and sent them messengers.'[25] The connection between Chapters 5 and 6 is also quite explicit; the former ends with Mufaḍḍal's question to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq about what God created from the disobedience of believers, to

[20] *KH*, p. 20.

[21] Ibid., p. 21.

[22] Ibid., p. 22.

[23] Here I follow Ghālib's edition [Beirut, 1964; repr. 2009] hereinafter referred to as Ghālib, p. 23. Tāmir's version is 'He began telling the inhabitants of each heaven, in their heaven (*bi samāʾihā*)' (p. 23). 'In their heaven' makes little sense and is grammatically incorrect, for *ahl*, which in this context stands for 'inhabitants', requires a masculine plural possessive pronoun – *samāʾihim* – instead of the feminine singular pronoun in *samāʾihā*, used for inanimate plural nouns.

[24] *KH*, p. 26.

[25] Ibid., p. 27.

which the reply is 'the cursed Iblīs'.[26] The next one continues the theme, beginning with 'He created Iblīs from the disobedience of believers'.[27]

Chapter 7 is more loosely connected to the preceding one, but its content and style suggest that it is meant to supply a conclusion to the subject-matter of the previous six parts. It begins with a discussion of how the Devil felt hatred for the believers, how God guided humanity through the agency of the Prophet Muhammad, and how He told human beings not to disclose to the Devil or his progeny what He had made them from;[28] and it concludes with the covenant that God made with His messengers, legatees (*awṣiyāʾ*, whose identity is not specified),[29] and the believers to acknowledge His lordship. Chapter 8, which begins with the phrase 'then God gathered the souls of the messengers, the legatees and the believers' – that is, all those who had taken the covenant in the previous chapter, listed here in the very same order, concludes the theme of the covenant. For their souls, it says, God composed a writ (*kitāb*) on a tablet (*lawḥ*) of light, making Muhammad a witness.[30]

The conclusion of Chapter 8 suggests a loose connection to the one that follows. It ends with Jaʿfar's discussion of the term 'witness' as elaborated in Q. 4:41 and Q. 65:2. To this Mufaḍḍal responds that the Kufans interpret the verse with reference to women and to divorce, which Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq vehemently rejects. Chapter 9, then, discusses the possibility for a believing woman to divorce her husband if she learns that he is a Shiʿi-hater (*nāṣibī*).[31]

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 28.

[28] Ibid., p. 31.

[29] Chapter 37 of *KH*, pp. 93–96, identifies them with the Imams, but because it is part of a different textual layer, here their identity is not at all clear.

[30] Ibid., p. 33.

[31] The term *nāṣibī* has been used to denote those who rejected ʿAlī's superiority over the first two caliphs, who hated him, or those who hated the *ahl al-bayt* or all of the Shiʿis, see E. Kohlberg, 'Non Imāmī Muslims in Imāmī Ḥadīth and Fiqh', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 6 (1985), p. 99; cf. also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Only the Man of God is Human: Theology and Mystical Anthropology According to Early Imami Exegesis', in his *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London, 2011), pp. 278–279, n. 4.

Some of the ideas discussed in the initial eight chapters of *Kitāb al-haft* are also found in later ones, such as the teaching about the *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*. However, this layer stands apart from the rest of the book, firstly, for its formal unity and thematic coherence. Secondly, because except for a brief quotation on the authority of ʿAlī[32] there is no mention of the Imams,[33] while the important role of the Prophet is stressed in a most explicit manner.

Layer 2: Chapters 25, 33–35 and 37

The second layer consists of five chapters (25, 33–35, 37) that are unified thematically and revolve around the process of birth, around death, and the notions of purity and pollution associated with these two events. These chapters do not contradict the initial eight and it is not impossible to regard them both as having a common origin – all the more so since another text of related content, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, contains both the creation story from the first layer of *Kitāb al-haft* and a discussion of the death and birth found in its second layer. Still, because these five chapters are spatially removed from the initial eight, they are tentatively regarded as a separate textual unit.

The most closely connected of these five are Chapters 34, 35 and 37, while 33 and 25 resemble them in their content, but do not exhibit any special textual markers indicating a connection to them. The other three, on the other hand, follow a coherent narrative line detailing the birth and death of the believers, unbelievers and the Imams.

Chapters 34 and 35 talk about the death and birth of believers and unbelievers, respectively, where each group traverses through parallel (but diametrically opposed) stages of these processes that are described in a uniform style and vocabulary. After death, the believers are immersed in the Spring of Life (*ʿayn al-ḥayāt*) and the infidels (*kuffār* sg. *kafīr*) in the Spring of the Lowly (*ʿayn al-ardhāl*). During

[32] *KH*, ch. 5, p. 27.

[33] Save for the fact that the narrator of the text is said to be Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. However, it is a peculiar textual feature that is not connected with the content of the text itself; secondly, it is a feature shared by virtually the entire text of *Kitāb al-haft*, and could be a later addition. It must also be noted that this layer contains the term *awṣiyāʾ*, 'legatees', which is used in layer 2 in reference to the Imams. Here, however, there is no indication that the term is used with this meaning.

pregnancy, the believer's soul remains in Paradise while the unbeliever's is thrown into the impurity of the womb. When the throes of labour begin, in both cases the Imam and the angels give the foetus a shove: *zajarat al-malāʾika al-badana zajran* 'the angels give the body a push', and *yazjuruhā zajratan* 'gives it a push'.[34] This makes the foetus turn upside down from fear: *fa-yanqalib al-badan* 'the body turns upside down', and *fa-yanqalib al-raʾs ilā asfal* 'the head is turned downward'. Immediately after birth, and upon seeing the Imam and the angels, the believer feels happy and 'does not frown nor scowl' (*lā yaʿbas wa lā yaklaḥ*), while the unbeliever 'frowns and scowls' (*yaʿbas wa yaklaḥ*) out of fear of the angels.[35]

Chapter 37 is about the birth of the Imams (called here also *awṣiyāʾ*, 'legatees'), and thematically forms a logical continuation of the story elaborated in the preceding three chapters. Textually, it is connected to them by the Imam's statement, 'The believer is [born] *as I have told you in the proceeding chapters*… and the birth of the legatees differs from the birth of believers just as the birth of believers differs from the birth of unbelievers' (emphasis mine).[36]

The formal connection of Chapters 25 and 33 to this group is less explicit, and it is very likely that they were not conceived as part of the story told in the other three. Thematically, however, they contain ideas which are very similar, and Chapter 33 appears to be a summary of Chapter 34 and tells about the 'Spring of Life', the believer's death and his sojourn in Paradise. Chapter 25 tells the story of a believer's birth, stressing the point that his soul never dwells in the womb, but descends from near God into the body of a newborn child, and his cries are a sign of his faith.

Layer 3: Chapters 42–45 and 47

This layer consists of a group of five chapters which bear a striking resemblance to one another both in their content and their vocabulary.

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[34] In my 'An Early Shīʿi Cosmology', paras 56 and 67, *zajara* (used in the same context) is translated as 'holds back' and 'slows down', but judging by the context, 'push' appears to be a better translation. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this book for this suggestion.

[35] *KH*, pp. 88–91.

[36] Ibid., pp. 93–96.

Furthermore they directly contradict Chapter 46, which therefore appears to have been inserted into the cluster. The central idea discussed in this layer is that of God's justice. It is expressed in the notion that He enables unbelievers to assume human form and to live better lives in the material world due to their good deeds, allows unbelievers (*kuffār*) and believers (*muʾminūn*) to avenge one another's transgressions, and regulates relationships between believers. The words used to denote the idea of justice are derived from the synonyms *ʿadl* and *inṣāf*, and some of the phrases in which they are used are identical in different chapters. Below is a list of statements about justice from the chapters of this layer:

(1) God does not neglect the compensation of him who performs good deeds… God gives them the blessing that you see, in justice (*ʿadlan*) and fairness (*inṣāfan*).[37]
(2) This is compensation for him [i.e. the unbeliever], according to the degree of his deeds.[38]
(3) God is just, and does not wrong [anyone] (*ʿādil lā yajūr*), and He designed the creation in justice (*ʿadl*) and fairness (*inṣāf*); no one is His favourite nor a relative, neither does your Lord treat anyone unjustly (*lā yaẓlim rabbuka aḥadan*).[39]
(4) Your Lord does not treat anyone unjustly (*lā yaẓlim rabbuka aḥadan*), and does not command anyone to do injustice.[40]
(5) God is just and does not wrong [anyone] (*ʿādil lā yajūr*), He is wise and fair (*munṣif*).[41]

The five chapters of the layer also form a rather coherent narrative, each discussing a particular aspect of the relationship between believers and unbelievers. Thus Chapter 42 states that thanks to God's justice, the unbelievers are rewarded for their good deeds and for striving towards religion 'according to the degree of their knowledge'. As a reward, God enables them to live easy and good lives in the material world. Having received their rewards, however,

[37] Ibid., ch. 42, p. 119.
[38] Ibid., ch. 43, p. 120.
[39] Ibid., ch. 44, p. 122.
[40] Ibid., ch. 45, p. 126.
[41] Ibid., ch. 47, p. 129.

they return to the suffering of *masūkhiyya*, that is, transformation into sub-human forms. In Chapter 43, the ideas of the reward for unbelievers and the incidences of their struggle for the faith, expressed in good deeds, prayer, fasting and so on, are reiterated. It also says that some unbelievers may become transformed into human form and some into animals, which is their reward (or punishment) for their prior actions. Upon returning to *masūkhiyya*, they may also be rewarded with a lighter form of suffering.

The following two chapters, 44 and 45, discuss what believers and unbelievers do to each other to avenge or reward each other's actions. Chapter 44 states that while the believers are in humanity (*nāsūtiyya*), the infidels undergo transformation (*masūkhiyya*) through a number of forms (*tarākīb*), during which the two groups return to each other the good or the evil done by each. The following chapter further elaborates the idea of revenge for prior transgressions, focusing on why the believers attack or curse the unbelievers both in human and in animal form. This, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal, is because of their past evil deeds perpetrated against the believers.

Chapter 47 continues the discussion begun in the previous two. It speaks of two aspects of servitude (*ʿubūdiyya*), the first being the servitude of one believer to another. It elaborates on the reciprocal relationship between the believers, stating that when one believer mistreats another in one incarnation, in the next God will elevate the latter, making him the former's master, so that he can take back what is owed. The second aspect of servitude is the servitude of the believer to his Lord, which is the first degree of his spiritual ascent, when external (*ẓāhir*) duties, such as prayer and fasting, are still mandatory for him. The 'knowledge of God in his purity without any suspicion and doubt'[42] elevates him to the degree of the free (*darajat al-aḥrār*), when these duties become unnecessary and his servitude ends. Here, the believer attains miraculous powers and is obeyed by mountains, seas, trees, the earth and the sky.[43] So great is his power that when he calls to Him, God responds, and when he asks Him for something, God grants it.

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[42] Ibid., ch. 47, p. 130.

[43] Ibid., p. 131.

As noted, Chapter 46 contradicts one of the central teachings of this textual layer, and must therefore have been inserted into it. The layer holds that, as part of the scheme of God's justice, the unbelievers may occasionally be reborn in human form as a reward for their good deeds. Chapter 46 rejects this outright, stating that an unbeliever 'never takes on human form'.[44]

Layer 4: Chapters 53–57

The general theme in Chapters 53–56 is rebirth and transformation into the opposite sex, based on the following three principles: males are better than females, believers are better than unbelievers, and (in the case of animals) edible ones are better than inedible ones.[45] Chapter 57 departs somewhat from the discussion, but because some of its elements continue the theme, it is also likely that it is part of this layer. Throughout the discussion in all these five chapters the term used for 'transformation' or 'rebirth' is *radda*, literally meaning 'return'.

The theme opens in Chapter 53 with a discussion of why some men 'like to copulate like women'.[46] This is a 'disease', Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal, with which only the enemies of the Imams and their followers are punished, and which never befalls any of the believing brethren. The adversaries are punished with this for denying ʿAlī's special relationship with God (*walāya*),[47] or for hating one of the Imams, who are God's friends (*awliyāʾ Allāh*), and it happens through transformation, when a lustful fornicating woman is reborn as a man, retaining from her previous physical form her desire to copulate in a particular way.

The two chapters that follow discuss whether men, both believing ones and infidels, can be reborn as women and vice versa. The

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[44] Ibid., ch. 46, p. 127.

[45] For some examples of similar attitudes to women in Nuṣayrī texts, see Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 166, n. 422.

[46] *KH*, pp. 145–146.

[47] In the Imāmī tradition the term *walāya* is used with different meanings, indicating, on the one hand, the special relationship between the Imam and God, and on the other, between believers and the Imam; for a thorough discussion of the history and meanings of the term, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes on Imami *Walāya*', in his *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London, 2011), pp. 231–275.

discussion is based on two notions, one, that women are less than men and, two, that believers are only reborn into 'shapes that are better and move to stations that are higher',[48] whereas unbelievers can only descend into lower forms. Following this logic, a believing man cannot be reborn as a woman, but a believing woman does indeed become a man on her path to perfection, never to take on a female body again. Male unbelievers, conversely, descend into lower forms and may become reborn as women, whereas unbelieving women never become men.

Chapter 56[49] moves from transmigration between human forms to animals. Here, however, the logic is different. Whereas in human beings male is better than female, in animals, edible (*yaḥullu akluhā*) is better than inedible (*lā yaḥullu akluhā*), because the latter 'have harmed humans' in the past. For this reason, the better, edible, animals are reborn as the opposite sex of the same species to preserve this superior quality of theirs, whereas the evil ones are reborn as the same sex of increasingly lower forms, eventually becoming many headed fire-breathing serpents.

Chapter 57 continues the theme of metamorphosis, but instead of the transformation from one sex to another it discusses transformation from master to slave and vice versa. Following the logic that believers are better than unbelievers, it states that whereas the former never become slaves of the latter, unbelievers can be slaves of believers. It is also possible that a believer becomes another believer's servant, but because God is just, he will reverse the order in the next rebirth. Their places will switch, master will become servant, and the servant will rule his former master.

Layer 5: Chapters 23, 38–41, the 'Narrative Layer'

The chapters that stand out most strikingly are 23 and 38–41.[50] Instead of theological and cosmological discussions and stories about the mythical past, found in other parts of *Kitāb al-haft*, they are stories about historical personalities – the Imams, their friends and their

[48] *KH*, ch. 55, p. 149; ch. 54, p. 147.
[49] Ghālib, pp. 145–146.
[50] *KH*, pp. 62–66, 98–101, 102–107, 108–117.

adversaries. Furthermore, in constrast to most of the text of *Kitāb al-haft*, these chapters are written in the form of lengthy anecdotes. The most obvious unifying feature of this group is that four of the five chapters stand next to each other and have similar titles: Chapters 23, 39 and 40 have the word *fī al-bāṭin* (or *ʿalā al-bāṭin*) in their titles, and discuss the 'internal' (or esoteric, *bāṭin*) aspects of two important events.[51] In addition to minor textual and thematic parallels, there are three prominent themes which variously unify the chapters of this layer. The first is the idea that the third Imam Ḥusayn's death at Karbalāʾ was only an illusion, the second is the harsh condemnation of the first two caliphs, AbūĞBakr and ʿUmar, and the third is the discussion of the first and third Imams, ʿAlīĞ and Ḥusayn's miraculous deeds, which are described as 'magic' by their enemies.

Chapters 38 to 40 are the ones that are most closely related thematically-speaking and share more elements with each other than with the other two. Most importantly, they are about the illusory nature of the death of Ḥusayn, and their aim is to show that he did not die in reality but only 'outwardly' (*fī al-ẓāhir*). Chapter 38 is the shortest of the group and it serves as an introduction to the following two. It does not focus just on Ḥusayn; rather, its purpose is to show that God protects His friends, and that they – in this case Ḥusayn, ʿAlīĞ b. AbīĞṬālib, Zakariyyā, Yaḥyā[52] and Jesus – have only died 'outwardly'.

Building their argument on this general statement, the next two chapters, 39 and 40, develop the idea of Ḥusayn's death as illusory, focusing more closely on his killing and explaining its nature and the events surrounding it. Chapter 39 relates him and his brother, the second Imam Ḥasan, to, respectively, Ismāʿīl and Isḥāq, the sons of Ibrāhīm (the biblical Abraham): 'ʿḤasan in Ibrāhīm's time was Isḥāq, and Ḥusayn in Ibrāhīm's time was Ismāʿīl',[53] probably meaning that

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[51] 'On the Inner Meaning of Umm Kulthūm's Marriage' (في معرفة تزويج أم كلثوم في الباطن), 'On the knowledge of the meaning of our Lord Ḥusayn's Killing in esoteric terms' (في معرفة تمعنى مقتل تمولانا الحسين في الباطن), 'On the Esoteric Meaning of the Killing of al-Ḥusayn in the Time of the Umayyads' (في معرفة تقتل تالحسين معلى تالباطن تفي مزمن تبني مأمية – this according to Ghālib, p. 96).

[52] These are the Muslim equivalents of John the Baptist and his father Zechariah.

[53] *KH*, p. 98.

they are later incarnations of these two.[54] Alluding to the story of the Abrahamic sacrifice as elaborated in Q. 37:99–108, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal that even the lamb that was sent as a ransom for Ḥusayn (then incarnated as Ismāʿīl) did not descend from Paradise, as some wrongly thought, but was ʿUmar in disguise, for ʿGod did not create something for Paradise to then torture it by killing'. In this illusory manner, Ḥusayn is said to have been 'killed' more than a thousand times.[55]

Chapter 40 further elaborates on the illusory nature of Ḥusayn's death, beginning with Mufaḍḍal's question to the Imam: 'Tell me, Lord, the story of Ḥusayn: how it appeared to him that he was killed and slaughtered, just as it had appeared to those before him that Jesus was killed.'[56] Jaʿfar tells him that an Imam enters his body and leaves it just as one puts on a shirt and takes it off. Therefore, on the day when his enemies had assembled to kill him, he simply left his body, and God brought him near Himself, protecting him from his enemies. Then there follows a description of some of the events that took place before the battle of Karbalāʾ. When the two armies prepared to fight, Ḥusayn sent Jibrīl (who later turned out to be one of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb's manifestations) to the enemy camp to find out whom they were preparing to fight. Disguised in the body of a stranger, Jibrīl entered the enemy camp and learned that they were there to kill Ḥusayn. When they were about to attack, Ḥusayn ordered Jibrīl to pick out two Abyssinian soldiers from their ranks and bring them to him. In

[54] Ibid., p. 99: '[Ismāʿīl] is Ḥusayn [. . .] there is no difference between them, they are like one.'

[55] On the story of the Abrahamic sacrifice in Muslim tradition, see R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, 1990), pp. 129–134; on the heavenly origin of the lamb, see p. 131. The figure of Ḥusayn in connection with the sacrifice story appears elsewhere in early Shiʿi tradition as well, albeit in a slightly different role: here, he is not a later incarnation of Abraham's sacrificial son, but instead, his martyrdom is equated with the sacrifice of the lamb. See idem, 'Merit, Memesis, and Martyrdom: Aspects of Shiʿite Meta-historical Exegesis on Abraham's Sacrifice in Light of Jewish, Christian, and Sunni Muslim Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 66 (1998), pp. 109–111.

[56] Ghālib, p. 96; Tāmir's version is 'how he was killed and how the people had the illusion of his death' (p. 102), which makes little sense in this context.

Ḥusayn's camp the soldiers turned out to be two spotted lambs that had undergone *masūkhiyya*. Jibrīl then said that in reality, probably before they had been transformed into animals, they were Muʿāwiya and Saʿd,[57] a reference to the first Umayyad caliph and to Muhammad's companion, the general Saʿd b. AbīWaqqāṣ (d. 6th decade AH) – father of the Umayyad commander at the battle of Karbalāʾ, ʿUmar b. Saʿd. The soldiers begged for forgiveness but Ḥusayn refused to grant it, and they were returned to their camp. The story is left unfinished. In what remains, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb appears before Jaʿfar and Mufaḍḍal, revealing that he is in reality Jibrīl, and that he had been with Ḥusayn on the day of Karbalāʾ.

Apart from the theme of the illusory nature of Ḥusayn's death, four other elements unify Chapters 38 and 39 on the one hand, and 39 and 40 on the other. Thus, in the former two, Ḥusayn's death and all the alleged killings of all the chosen ones are described with the phrase 'tasting the heat of iron' (*dhāqa ḥarr al-ḥadīd*). These chapters contain phrases such as: 'Do you fancy in your mind and in your thoughts that they taste the heat of iron from God's enemies and theirs';[58] or 'God forbid that [Ḥusayn] should taste the heat of iron'.[59] The fact that these 'chosen ones' are Ḥusayn and the three biblical characters – Jesus, Zakariyyāand YaḥyāG- is another feature common to the two chapters.

The comparison of the illusory deaths of Ḥusayn and Jesus unifies Chapters 39 and 40. In 39, the author states that 'Ḥusayn's case is the same as that of Jesus'; he then quotes Q. 4:157–158, where Jesus is said to be neither crucified nor killed, but {it was made to appear like that to them}.[60] Chapter 40, as already noted, begins with Mufaḍḍal's question where he compares Ḥusayn's illusory killing to that of Jesus. Later, on the day of Karbalāʾ, Jibrīl says to Ḥusayn: 'These base

[57] Muʿāwiya is Ghālib's variant (p. 99). In Tāmir's text, Saʿd's name is followed by *al-amlaḥ*, which does not make sense, and is probably due to a scribe's repetition of the word *amlaḥ*.

[58] *KH*, ch. 38, p. 97.

[59] Ibid., ch. 39, p. 98.

[60] Ibid., p. 99. In Chapter 40 (p. 103), Jibrīl also compares Ḥusayn's martyrdom to that of Jesus, saying: 'You are God's friend (*walī*) . . . these base people told themselves that they should kill you, but they shall not get that [i.e. the killing], nor any of God's friends, just as they did not get to ʿĪsāor ʿAlī, the Commander of the Believers.'

people are tempted to kill you, but they will not reach that [goal], nor [will they get to] any one of God's friends, just as they did not get to Jesus.'[61]

The two chapters also share an idiosyncratic phrase – *kabsh amlaḥ* 'spotted lamb'.[62] In the former, it refers to the lamb which God sent as ransom for Ismāʿīl/Ḥusayn, and which turned out to be ʿUmar.[63] In the following one, it refers to the two soldiers in the army of Ḥusayn's enemy, who turned out to be two spotted lambs in the state of *masūkhiyya*, who then became human beings.

A theme which appears nowhere else in *Kitāb al-haft* but which runs through Chapters 23, 39 and 41 is a harsh condemnation of the first two caliphs, especially ʿUmar. While Chapter 39 mentions him in passing, Chapters 23 and 41 are entirely dedicated to vilifying him. Chapter 23 is a justification of ʿAlī's giving ʿUmar permission to marry his daughter.[64] It claims that the marriage was an illusion, and that in reality, under threat, ʿAlīǴdeceived him, by making ʿUmar's own daughter look like Umm Kulthūm, so leading his enemy into an incestuous marriage with his own child.[65] Chapter 41 is a story about ʿAlī's interrogation of ʿUmar regarding the wealth he had embezzled. It ends with a scene where ʿAlīǴcommands him to distribute it among the

[61] In both editions, the phrase is 'will not get to ʿĪsā' (*lan yaṣilū ilā ʿĪsā*) (Ghālib, p. 97; *KH*, p. 103). However, it appears to be a scribal error and negation in the past tense with *lam* seems more plausible, not only because both ʿAlīǴand ʿĪsāǴlived before Ḥusayn, but also because the error could have easily occurred by substituting *lam* for future negation *lan*, in analogy with the previous *lan* in 'they will not reach that [goal]' (*lan yaṣilū ilā dhālika*).

[62] The word *amlaḥ* may also mean 'of a dusty white colour' or 'of a clear white colour', see Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. *m-l-ḥ*; this description of the lamb is also found in other early Muslim interpretations of the Qurʾanic story of Abraham's sacrifice (as discussed above); see Firestone, *Journeys*, pp. 129 and 231, n. 3.

[63] *KH*, pp. 99–100.

[64] On these events, see W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: a Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 67.

[65] A similar theme appears elsewhere in Shiʿi literature, as shown by Etan Kohlberg in his, 'Some ImāmīShīʿīǴViews on the Ṣaḥāba', *Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), p. 163.

people, and the latter obeys, fearing ʿAlī's capacities for the miraculous.[66]

The two caliphs are referred to by the derogatory nicknames commonly used in the early Shiʿi milieu to vilify them. The most common is 'Adlam', used for ʿUmar throughout Chapters 23 and 41.[67] In Chapter 23 the author uses the nickname the 'Second Adlam' (*Adlam al-thānī*), probably referring to AbūBakr.[68] And in Chapter 39, the lamb that is sacrificed as a ransom for Ḥusayn is in reality Adlam Quraysh, that is, ʿUmar.[69]

The next prominent feature unifying Chapters 23, 40 and 41, is that ʿAlīand Ḥusayn perform miraculous acts which are designated as magic by their enemies. In the story of Umm Kulthūm, after ʿUmar has married his own daughter thinking she is ʿAlī's, his friends come to congratulate him. Here, as if sensing that something is amiss, ʿUmar

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[66] *KH*, p. 116.

[67] See, e.g. *KH*, ch. 23, p. 63; ch. 39, p. 100; ch. 41, pp. 108, 111–112, 115–116. *Lisān al-ʿarab* states that the word *adlam*, when referring to a man, means 'tall and of dark complexion'; it also mentions the fact that it is ʿUmar's nickname (s.v. *d-l-m*), but in this context, the nickname does not appear to be derogatory. Kohlberg notes that ʿUmar was called 'Dulām', a word derived from the same root and with a similar meaning ('Some Imāmī', p. 162); see also Bar-Asher, 'Shīʿism and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. 4, pp. 593–604.

[68] In Ghulat literature AbūBakr and ʿUmar are interchangeably called *al-awwal* and *al-thānī*, cf. *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 195–199, *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, p. 283; cf. also *Kitāb al-kashf*, ed. MuṣṭafāGhālib (Beirut, 1984), p. 30, parts of which, it is most likely, are of Ghulat provenance. In some texts, such as *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, the 'first' one is ʿUmar because he was more evil than AbūBakr and because it was he who instigated the latter to do evil; this view is also reflected in *ḥadīth*, cf. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* (Beirut, 1431/2010), pp. 314–320, 322; I. Goldziher, 'Spottnamen der ersten Chalifen bei den Shīʿiten', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Hildesheim, 1970), p. 297, n. 4; cf. also J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. u. 3. Jh. H: eine Geschichte des religiosen Denkens im fruhen Islam* (Berlin, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 308–312.

[69] *KH*, p. 100. Chapter 23 refers to ʿUmar and AbūBakr using other nicknames, which are missing in the other two; ʿUmar is called 'Zāfir', which seems to be just a proper name (cf. *Lisān*, s.v. *z-f-r*); another proper name derived from the same root, 'Zufar', was also used by the Shiʿis to refer to ʿUmar (cf. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī', p. 162). AbūBakr was called 'Ḥabtar', i.e. 'dwarf' or 'fox'; see M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden, 1999), index.

says: 'By God, they [i.e. ʿAlīand his kin] are magicians (*saḥara*), sorcerers (*kahana*), liars, and this is one of their tricks.'[70] Then he learns from Salmān al-Fārisī, a companion of the Prophet who in the story appears as ʿAlī's confidant, [71] that ʿAlīhas indeed duped him.

In Salmān's story in Chapter 41, ʿAlīagain sends him to ʿUmar to inform that he knows about the plot he has hatched with some other person to get a large sum of money from Khurāsān. Hearing this, it says, ʿUmar's 'colour changed' because, according to him, nobody could have known about his meeting with that person, and therefore ʿAlīonly knew about it due to his magical abilities. ʿUmar then tries to seduce Salmān into abandoning ʿAlīand becoming his friend, by showing him that 'the Hāshimites have inherited their magic' generation upon generation,[72] and by telling several stories about miraculous deeds performed by ʿAlīand his ancestors.[73] Salmān rebukes him, saying that although the stories are true, ʿAlī's deeds, and those of his relatives, are 'not magic but God's gift and His Divine power'.[74]

In Chapter 40, finally, when Jibrīl penetrates the enemy's camp on Ḥusayn's orders, he wreaks havoc among them by spitting at them and disappearing. Thereupon, one of ʿUmar b. Saʿd's soldiers tells his frightened commander: 'You have no doubt heard that Ḥusayn and his father ʿAlīhave been practising some magic.'[75]

There are two relatively minor details that further support the idea of the unity of the five chapters. First, both in 23 and 41 ʿAlī's messenger to ʿUmar is Salmān al-Fārisī. The second detail is a textual one: to explain why God allows the illusion of evil to happen, Chapters 23 and 38, otherwise unrelated thematically, use the exact same phrase. In the former, where ʿUmar and ʿAlīare said to be later manifestations

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[70] This passage is only found in Ghālib's edition, p. 62.

[71] He figures prominently in both Shiʿi and Nuṣayrīliterature; for more detail see Chapter 3, section 'Inter-communal Polemics in the 3rd/9th Century'.

[72] *KH*, pp. 112, 115.

[73] E.g., ʿAlīcrosses a large distance in a brief period of time, sees the Prophet who is ill, makes his bow turn into a snake, and his father AbūṬālib saves a caravan from Bedouin attack by sheltering it on an island which he makes appear in the middle of the desert.

[74] *KH*, p. 115.

[75] Ibid., p. 104.

of, respectively, Qābīl and Hābīl (the biblical Cain and Abel), Qābīl threatens to kill his brother if he does not allow him to marry his daughter, and so receives his permission. Of course, Hābīl does not let this happen in reality, but only 'in appearance' (*fī al-ẓāhir*). The author then says that 'God is too great to do these horrid things to His friends, but he does this externally, in an illusory way, to affirm His proof for the tyrannical enemies', referring to the killing of Hābīl by Qābīl as described in Q. 5:30.[76] A phrase which is almost identical to 'externally [. . .] to affirm His proof' (*ʿalā al-ẓāhir [. . .] li taʾkīd al-ḥujja*) occurs in Chapter 38, where the Imam tells Mufaḍḍal that God does not allow the Imams and the prophets to be killed, and that their death is but an illusion.[77]

Finally, Chapters 23, 39 and 40 all compare the death of an Imam – ʿAlī or Ḥusayn – to the illusory death of Jesus. In Chapters 39 and 23, moreover, Q. 4:157 is quoted in support.[78]

Layer 6: Chapters 10–11, 12–15 and 16

This layer consists of two groups of chapters, both exhibiting a clear continuity between its parts, 10, 11 and 16 on the one hand, and 12 to 15 on the other. However, the relationship between these two groups is not very clear, and given the lack of explicit contradictions they may have initially been part of the same text. At the same time, Chapters 12 to 15 seem to have been inserted between the group of 10 and 11 and 16, as these three exhibit a clear thematic continuity between one another, and might have initially been a single whole. In what follows, the thematic and textual features that unify the two groups will be indicated. Since, despite their different thematic foci, the two groups of chapters contain no apparent contradictions, and, more importantly, because they help in defining each other, the two groups will be discussed as a united whole.

Chapters 10 to 11 and 16 are unified by the common theme of the 'mixing' between believers and unbelievers, and 10 and 11 also share

[76] Ibid., p. 63. On the previous page the phrase occurs without *ʿalā al-ẓāhir* and refers to ʿAlī's illusory deaths in his six manifestations.

[77] Ibid., p. 97.

[78] Ibid., p. 62.

the idea that God veiled Himself from His creation. Chapter 10[79] begins with the story of how God created Adam and his progeny on the one hand and the Devil and his progeny on the other (and which appears as a summary of pararagraphs 10 to 12 of *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*). Having made a covenant with Adam and his offspring, God concealed Himself in the Adamic veils (*ḥujub ādamiyya*); this could mean 'human' veils, but in this context it refers to Adam specifically,[80] for the author then writes that God ordered the prophets, legatees and angels to worship Adam, which they did, whereas the Devil and his progeny refused to, using the lines from the Qurʾanic story of the Devil's refusal to bow to Adam (Q. 38:75–76). And because God was now veiled and the Devil did not know where to worship him, he turned to stones, idols, the sun and the moon, worshipping them in the hope that God might be concealed in them.[81] The part that connects this chapter to the other two is where God puts the Devil and his children and Adam and his children into bodies, which is why believers and unbelievers can be easily confused, as their difference is not apparent from their physical appearance.

Chapter 11 reiterates the idea that God did not allow the Devil and his progeny to worship Him, concealing Himself in Adam, which echoes the previous chapter.[82] Then it continues to elaborate on the notion of the 'mixing' (*mizāj*) of believers and unbelievers. The explanation of this mixing is no more detailed than in the previous chapter, and it simply states that when the mixing occurred, the two groups became mingled through marriage and copulation (*al-tazwīj*

[79] Ibid., pp. 36–37.

[80] This play of words in which derivatives of the personal name 'Ādam': *ādamiyyun*, which means 'human beings' but is also used to refer to numerous 'Ādams', *ādamiyya*, meaning both 'human' and 'relating to Ādam', is used in many other texts in the Corpus, cf. *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 38–44; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl wa'l-ṣūra*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 1, p. 213; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 98.

[81] *Kitāb al-haft* does not give a full elaboration of this statement, just saying that 'the Devil worshipped stones, idols, the sun and the moon, but His greatness is more magnificent and more holy than concealment in these'. A fuller explanation of the story, which I have relied on here, is found in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 11–12, which have a more complete list of the objects which the Devil and his progeny worshipped in their search of God.

[82] *KH*, p. 38.

wa'l-nikāḥ) and through the 'confusion of bodies' (*ishtibāh al-abdān*), so that a believer can give birth to an unbeliever and vice versa.

The connection of Chapter 16 to the latter two is weaker,[83] and is based on a broad thematic commonality. It also discusses the idea of mixing, and has no specific textual clues that might reveal an author common also to the other two. This indicates that it may have had a different author, but initially might have been placed next to 10 and 11 because of their similarity, until 12 to 15 were inserted between them, although all in all the significance of this choice remains unclear.

The four chapters that fall in between these, 12 to 15, are chiefly unified by the theme of the degrees of belief, the so-called *darajāt*. They form a sevenfold hierarchical ladder leading a believer to God, and occur in numerous texts of the Corpus.[84] Chapter 12 begins by identifying the first degree of believers through a quotation of Q. 49:3,[85] which speaks of God's testing (*imtaḥana*) of the believers' hearts; although the degree is not named directly, this is a reference to *mumtaḥan*, the degree of the 'Tested' occurring elsewhere in *Kitāb al-haft* and other texts of the Corpus.[86] It next mentions the degrees of *naqīb* (the Chief) and *mukhlaṣ* (the Devout), introducing the latter also with a Qurʾanic verse (19:51). The chapter ends with a discussion which provides one more feature connecting it to the one that follows. Namely, it states that 'prayer is the Commander of the Believers, alms is knowing him; prayer is knowing us, and alms is in us', where 'us' refers to the Imams since the presumed speaker is Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. This statement refers to the idea that religious duties, such as prayer and fasting, are in reality names of persons (in this case the Imams), and that the obligation to perform these duties refers in reality to the

[83] Ibid., p. 47.

[84] For a fuller discussion and references to this teaching, see Chapter 5.

[85] *KH*, pp. 39–40.

[86] The Arabic تحن could be vocalised both as the passive form *mumtaḥan*, i.e. one who is tested, and as the active *mumtaḥin*, referring to him who tests, and there are no strong indications in favour of one reading over the other. In the first case, this would be the degree where the believer is *tested*, and in the latter, it would be the degree which *tests*. There is one passage in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 77, where the active form seems more plausible: 'the Stage of the Tester (المتحن) for which the seeker strives and from which he receives knowledge, is a tester (المتحن) for him', but this logic need not apply to all the texts.

knowledge of these persons. This antinomian idea is reiterated at the end of Chapter 13,[87] which continues the theme of the degrees. When asked whether knowledge of the degrees is incumbent upon a person, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq replies that it is, and that it frees one from the necessity to perform the 'external' (*ẓāhir*) duties of worship, referring to the physical acts of prayer, fasting and so on.

Chapters 14 and 15 conclude the theme, the former completing the discussion of the degrees of believers, and the latter talking about similar degrees for unbelievers.[88] In Chapter 13 the Imam tells Mufaḍḍal that a person who is on one of these degrees must be obeyed by those of his brethren who are on lower ones, and when he reaches the highest one, that of the *bāb* (Gate), he acquires miraculous abilities. In Chapter 14 he says that an unbeliever goes through types of degrees similar to those a believer goes through – *mumtaḥan bi'l-kufr* 'Tested in unbelief', or *naqīb fī al-ṭughyān* 'the Chief in tyranny', and so on – until he becomes an accursed devil.

Layer 7: Chapters 60 and 61[89]

These two chapters are similar both in content and in terminology and complement one another, at the same time sharing many key elements with the 'firm kernel'. Both state that on the day of Resurrection,[90] called in both *al-jamʿ al-akbar*[91] ('the great gathering'),[92] the Prophet Muhammad will rise and the metamorphosed beings (*musūkh*) will be annihilated. The idea of annihilation in both chapters is expressed by the same term – *yatalāshā*.[93] In both, finally, the believers and infidels are divided on this day into three groups each. The names of the three groups slightly differ in the two chapters, but indicate the same things. Thus, the 'people of reward' (*ahl al-thawāb*) are divided into those

[87] *KH*, pp. 41–42.

[88] Ibid., pp. 43–46.

[89] Ibid., pp. 158–161.

[90] Ibid., ch. 61, p. 160.

[91] Ibid., ch. 60, p. 158, ch. 61, p. 160.

[92] Echoing perhaps the Qurʾanic idea of gathering on the day of Resurrection, expressed by the term *ḥashr* (50:44), cf. M. Borrmans, 'Resurrection', *EQ*, vol. 4, pp. 434–435.

[93] *KH*, pp. 158, 160. In Ghālib (p. 151) *yatalāshā* is omitted in Chapter 60.

who will become luminous (*nūrānī*) or, according to the next chapter, will go to Paradise. The second group goes to the 'abode of trial' (*dār al-balā'*) in the first chapter, and to the 'abode of purification' (*dār al-taṣfiya*) in the second. Finally, the third group becomes chaff (*qashsh*)[94] and *naskh*, and in the next chapter enters the crops of birds and the bellies of fish, and becomes *naskh*. The 'people of punishment' (*ahl al-ʿiqāb*) become fiery (*nīrāniyya*) or enter Hell, go to the 'abode of trial' (*dār al-balā'*) (in both chapters), and become *maskh*, or, more specifically, turn into worms.

Despite the similarities between these two chapters and the first layer of *Kitāb al-haft*, including the Prophet's prominent role (coupled with the absence of the Imams in the main text), and the idea of the seven Adams, one detail suggests that they were composed by different authors. In the initial eight chapters, the seven Adams exist simultaneously in the seven heavens, while in Chapters 60 and 61 they follow each other in seven successive historical cycles (*adwār*, sg. *dawr*), which conclude with the present, eighth cycle and the eighth Adam.

Layer 8: Chapter 59,[95] *Quotation from* Kitāb al-kashf?

The next layer consists of a single chapter which, with minor differences, repeats the fourth epistle of *Kitāb al-kashf*,[96] a multi-layered text attributed to the 4th/10th century Ismaili author Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. around 346/957),[97] and including numerous elements from the teachings of the Ghulat.[98] There are no strong indications as to the direction of the borrowing; the chapter is about the significance of the letters of the alphabet, and letter symbolism was prominent both in the early Ismaili tradition and among the Ghulat

[94] Ghālib, p. 151, Tāmir omits the word.

[95] *KH*, pp. 156–157.

[96] I am grateful to Rodrigo Adem for drawing my attention to this parallel.

[97] On this text see F. Gillon, 'Aperçus sur les origines de l'ismaélisme à travers le *Kitāb al-Kašf*, attribué au dâʿî aʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman', *Ishraq*, 4 (2013), pp. 90–111; W. Madelung, 'Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre', *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), p. 53.

[98] See, e.g., *Kitāb al-kashf*, ed. MuṣṭafāĞhālib (Beirut, 1404/1984), pp. 25, 32–33, 33–34, 50–51, 74, 89–90.

and Nuṣayrīs. The comparison with texts from both traditions, while revealing numerous minor parallels does not display any definitive connections with any of them.[99] Because in both texts this chapter seems to be inserted,[100] both *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-kashf* could have copied it from yet a third text.

Layer 9: Chapters 62–64,[101] *Quotation from* Kitāb al-kursīĞ

These three chapters appear to be an anonymous quotation from a certain *Kitāb al-kursī*, a text of Ghulat content which itself anonymously incorporates part of another similar work entitled *Kitāb al-aẓilla*.[102] To better understand *Kitāb al-kursī*'s place in *Kitāb al-haft*, one needs to look at the relationship between all three texts. Both *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-kursī* survive in fragments in texts attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr and three later NuṣayrīĞauthors, and both tell a creation story.[103] *Kitāb al-kursī* begins to overlap with

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[99] For a discussion of letter symbolism in early Islam, especially in Ismailism, see M. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn ʿArabī, and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 77–122; on early Shiʿi and especially Ghulat ideas, see S. Wasserstrom, 'Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal', *Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 3 (1993), pp. 16–20; many Ghulat and NuṣayrīĞtexts discuss letter symbolism, cf. the opening paragraph of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, quoted in al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 207; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 71–72; see also *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 209, 225 and Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 44; Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 17–18; Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa'l-anwār*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, p. 58; out of the numerous NuṣayrīĞtexts dealing with letters one may mention al-Jillī's *Risālat al-ḥurūf*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 335–341.

[100] Gillon, 'Aperçus', pp. 91–93; see also idem, 'Une version ismaélienne de *ḥadīṯs* imamites. Nouvelles perspectives sur le traité II du *Kitāb al-Kašf* attribué à aʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (Xe s.)', *Arabica*, 59 (2012), pp. 486–487.

[101] *KH*, pp. 162–171.

[102] See my 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 133–135.

[103] *Kitāb al-kursī* is quoted in the following texts: Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 227–229; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī al-asrār*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 181–182; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 80–81; ʿAlīĞal-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif fī ithbāt al-ḥaqq ʿalā al-mubāyin wa'l-mukhālif*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 4, p. 273; *Kitāb al-aẓilla* is quoted in the following: Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 210; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 207–209; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 41, 45, 71–74, 168, 173.

Kitāb al-aẓilla when the latter's story is well underway and the two texts continue with a nearly identical narrative for almost a page, then part ways, each continuing with its own story. And it is precisely in this part, where its commonality with *Kitāb al-aẓilla* ends, that *Kitāb al-kursī* begins to overlap with *Kitāb al-haft*'s Chapter 62: 'Then God spread His light' (*inna'llāh saṭaḥa nūrah*). The passage from *Kitāb al-kursī* which is quoted in *Kitāb al-haft* is more complete than the fragments quoted in the texts of Ibn Nuṣayr and the two NuṣayrīĞ authors.

Layer 10: Chapters 65 and 66, Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla

These two chapters are collections of *ḥadīth*, each organised around one theme of Ghulat cosmology. It is not easy to discern whether they are separate layers or part of the same, since they resemble each other structurally. Chapter 65, however, is much longer, and apart from *ḥadīth* contains a lengthy apocalyptic story about the *ghayba*, in which is mentioned the dynasty of the BanūĞMirdās,[104] who ruled in Syria between 415/1024 and 473/1080, thus setting a terminus post quem for its composition (or rather, for the composition of this particular story). Most of the traditions, narrated chiefly by the fifth and sixth Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732) and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and 'extremists' such as Mufaḍḍal, Muḥammad ibn Sinān and Yūnus b. Ẓabyān,[105] centre around the notion of the seven Adams, and it is here that the term *haft* is used (in the form *haftiyya*) as denoting the seven Adams and the seven heavens.[106]

Chapter 66 consists of just twelve *ḥadīth*,[107] followed by a quotation from the opening passage of *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, which is blended into the text without any acknowledgment of the source.[108] Most of the reports

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[104] *KH*, p. 184.

[105] Yūnus was a contemporary of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; his ideas and image will be discussed in the following chapter.

[106] *KH*, pp. 176 and 179; it is this feature of the text that has lead Halm to conclude that the title of *Kitāb al-haft* (deriving from the Persian word for 'seven') was added along with the last eight chapters, Halm, 'Das "Buch der Schatten" ' [II], pp. 66–67.

[107] *KH*, pp. 189–192.

[108] Ibid., pp. 192–197.

have only one narrator, either Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Muḥammad b. Sinān or Mufaḍḍal (who is also the narrator of the passage from *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*), but in a few cases there are two. Thematically, most of these stories discuss topics found in the passage quoted from *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, including the notions of *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*, the story of the seven Adams, transformation into sub-human forms, and the story of the glorification and praising of God before the creation by the Imams. In this latter story, the Imams are said to have been near God (presumably before all else was created), glorifying and extolling him, with the angels following suit. The content of the story recalls the opening passage of *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* (which follows these *ḥadīth* in the same chapter), where God creates the shadows and apparitions, and glorifies and extols Himself, and then the shadows and apparitions do the same; the language of glorification and extolling, furthermore, is similar in both versions – *tasbīḥ* and *taqdīs* in *Kitāb al-haft*, and *tasbīḥ* and *tahlīl* in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*. Both these stories, furthermore, belong to a larger mythological tradition about the extolling of God at the beginning of time – either by Himself, or the Imams, or by the shadows and apparitions, who in some cases are the Imams. All of these elements are shared with *Kitāb al-haft*'s first layer, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* and a number of reports preserved in Imāmī *ḥadīth* compilations.[109] This further explains why it circulated together with the passage from *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*.

Layer 11: Chapter 67[110]

The last layer of *Kitāb al-haft* consists of its last chapter, which stands out from the preceding two in that it contains only two stories, a shorter one narrated on the authority of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, followed by a longer one on the authority of his father, al-Bāqir. Both are about the rights and obligations of the believers with regard to one another, and about their virtues.

This chapter demonstrates the complicated nature of the text of *Kitāb al-haft*, raising as many questions as it gives answers. The first

[109] These will be discussed in the next chapter, in the section on the '*aẓilla* Group'.

[110] *KH*, pp. 198–207.

question that remains open is whether a further division of the text into layers is possible. While various textual markers and the content of its various chapters, as well as the recent discovery and publication of other texts of the same tradition that it quotes, all suggest that *Kitāb al-haft* may be divided into eleven distinct textual units, the discovery of more texts and more internal clues may allow for further division. The authorship and dating of the various layers is another question, which may never be fully resolved because of the paucity of evidence. Finally, the chronology of the emergence of the now available text of *Kitāb al-haft* is a further avenue for future research; thus, not only is it difficult to find out in what order various layers were added to its initial core; it is still unclear whether such a core ever existed at all. Nevertheless, at least partial answers to some of these questions are possible, and they will be pursued in the chapters that follow.

2

The Early Ghulat and their Textual Milieu

Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī and Literary Activity among the Early Ghulat

Determining when the Ghulat began composing works is difficult because, as noted earlier, the Ghulat texts are a confusing collection of writings, for which authorship is unclear and dates of composition are not given. A look at the biographical and bibliographic works documenting the early history of the Shiʿi community, however, reveals traces of literary activity taking place among the Ghulat in the latter part of the 2nd/8th and throughout the 3rd/9th century. A number of entries about individual authors living in this period apply to them terms that were aimed to underscore their 'exaggerated', 'extreme', or 'confused' beliefs. Thus, they list them as *ghālin*, that is, 'extremist', call them *murtafiʿ al-qawl* (lit. 'elevated in speech'), or allege that their writings are full of 'confusion' (*takhlīṭ*).[1] Of course, in some cases the use of the term *ghālin* alone by a later author with regard to an individual living in the 2nd–3rd/8th–9th centuries says nothing about his religious beliefs and need not indicate that he was one of the Ghulat. It could potentially be a polemical tool used to smear someone, such as in the case of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd (d. 209/824), whom al-Najāshī, author of one of the main Twelver bio-bibliographical dictionaries (d. 450/1058–1059), calls 'very weak' (*ḍāʿīf jiddan*) and an 'extremist', without specifying his beliefs.[2]

In the case of other authors, however, their adherence to Ghulat teachings is clearly reflected in the titles of their works. A certain

[1] For a discussion of these terms and a list of individuals accused of these offences, see Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 22–24.

[2] Or Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Ruhnīand ʿAbd Allāḥ b. al-Qāsim al-Ḥaḍramī, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* (Beirut, 1431/2010), pp. 322, 217 and 367.

Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān's numerous writings include, for example, three titles openly reminiscent of Ghulat themes.[3] His *Kitāb maqtal Abi'l-Khaṭṭāb* (The Book about the Killing of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb) and *Manāqib Abi'l-Khaṭṭāb* (The Virtues of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb) clearly refer to the famous 'extremist' Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb al-Asadī, whose career was outlined earlier, while the title *Kitāb al-qibāb* (The Book of Cycles) is likely to be a reference to the notion of historical cycles (*qubba*, pl. *qibāb*), found in early Ghulat texts and later adopted by the Nuṣayrīs.[4] Finally, when talking of his writings al-Najāshīżmentions *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn* (The Book of the Laudable and the Blameworthy), which has survived in fragments in later writings, one of which actually begins with his name.[5]

Works with the title *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, no doubt referring to the 'shadows' found in *Kitāb al-haft* and other related texts, are listed among the writings of several 2nd–3rd/8th–9th century authors, and according to the well-known Twelver theologian al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1032) the Ghulat wrote a number of works on this theme.[6] Al-Kashshīżgives reports about books written by the Ghulat, some of which he had probably seen himself.[7] One of the few cases of a book attested in external sources which has survived is that of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*,[8] mentioned by al-Masʿūdīż(d. 345/956) and two other authors, one of whom lived in the 5th/11th and the other in

[3] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 334.

[4] Cf. *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 203.

[5] The fragments beginning with his name are in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 118, 165; the other fragments are in al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 194, 198. Al-Najāshīżrecords the title of the book as *Kitāb al-mamdūḥīn wa'l-madhmūmīn*, which denotes essentially the same thing, with a slight shade of meaning: *maḥmūd* (from *ḥ-m-d*, 'to praise') referring to the quality of being 'praiseworthy', while *mamdūḥ* is simply a passive participle of the verb *madaḥa* ('to praise'), i.e. 'he who is praised'. Because all the original passages from this work agree on *maḥmūdīn*, this form will be used throughout.

[6] Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Masāʾil al-sarawiyya*, ed. Ṣāʾib ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (n.p., 1413/1992), p. 37.

[7] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmīżal-Iṣfahānīż(Qum, 1427/2006), pp. 271 and 481.

[8] Isḥāq and his writings will be discussed later.

the 9th/15th century,[9] and preserved fragmentarily in several Ghulat and Nuṣayrīżwritings.[10] Another is the above-mentioned *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn* by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān.

Kitāb al-haft is thus a product of Ghulat (and Nuṣayrī) literary activity stretching over more than three centuries, from the 2nd/8th and into the 5th/11th century. The exact dates of its layers are unknown, and the ascription of authorship to Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfīżis spurious – if only for the simple reason that it is a compilation of many layers. And with only one brief quotation dating from the 3rd/9th century, its earliest composition date is impossible to pin down. Still, thanks to the now available Ghulat texts and the information about them found in external sources, chiefly heresiographies and biographical dictionaries, and thanks to elements of 'extremist' teachings preserved in *ḥadīth*, it is possible to reconstruct to some degree the religious environment and literary context in which various layers of *Kitāb al-haft* originated and circulated.

As will be argued later, the first and seventh layers of *Kitāb al-haft* (comprising, respectively, Chapters 1–8 and 60–61) belong to a tradition of writings that focused on the notions of *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* but included other elements as well, such as the notion of the seven Adams. This group of texts may be tentatively dated to the late 2nd–early 3rd/8th–9th centuries, roughly coinciding with the lifetime of its alleged author. For this reason, and because he is the best documented of all the Ghulat individuals of his age, the life of Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfīżand the religious and social environment in which he lived is a convenient starting point for the foregoing discussion. Its study provides an insight into the position of the Ghulat in the wider Shiʿi community, their relationship with the *muqaṣṣira* and with their contemporary Imams.[11] Mufaḍḍal's Ghulat contacts, furthermore, reveal a connec-

[9] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and trans. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1864), vol. 3, pp. 265–266; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, in I. Friedlaender, 'The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of Ibn Ḥazm', *JAOS*, 28 (1907), p. 66; al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abūżghadda, vol. 2 (Beirut, 2002), p. 73.

[10] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 197, 200; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 22–23, 40–41, 42, 138, 165.

[11] Not much has been written about Mufaḍḍal in secondary literature. Ivanow dedicated a short paragraph to Mufaḍḍal in his *Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London,

tion to the environment where the literature on *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* originated.

Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī and the Kufan Ghulat

The figure of Mufaḍḍal left profound traces in the memory of later generations of Shiʿis at both ends of the Ghulat-*muqaṣṣira* spectrum. Some later Twelver authors condemned Mufaḍḍal as 'corrupt of doctrine' (*fāsid al-madhhab*), 'confused in his traditions' (*muḍṭarib al-riwāya*), unworthy of attention, weak in *ḥadīth* and arrogant,[12] while others praised him as a learned man and a righteous scholar.[13] In Nuṣayrīżbelief he appears as a high-ranking member of the religious hierarchy, God's 'Gate' (*bāb*), and the narrator of numerous traditions.[14] Both the Imāmīż and Nuṣayrīż traditions preserve a

1933), p. 30, where he noted that he was 'a devoted disciple of Imam Jaʿfar, inclined towards extremism'. His reading of al-Juʿfī's life, however, is incomplete and is only based on the works of al-Kashshīż(early 4th/10th century) and al-Ṭūsīż(d. 459–460/1066–1067). Brockelmann, in his equally short note on Mufaḍḍal, replicates the information given by previous authors, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (s) (Leiden, 1937–1942), vol. 1, p. 104. A brief note on Mufaḍḍal is included in Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 12 vols (Leiden and Frankfurt, 1967–2000), vol. 1, p. 534. Another short note on him is found in H. Modarressi's *Tradition and Survival: a Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), p. 333, again, presenting briefly what is known about him from Shiʿi sources, and discussing the literature attributed to him.

[12] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 398; Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī, *Rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍāżal-Jalālī (Qum, 1422/2002), p. 87.

[13] Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, ed. Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamīż(Beirut, 1399/1979), p. 288; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, ed. ĀghāżBuzurg Tihrānīż(Najaf, 1385/2013), p. 210.

[14] Al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 30, 31, 40–41, 55, 56, 58, 78–79, 96, 97, 119, 164, *et passim*; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 211–212, 221, 226; al-Junbulānī, *Īḍāḥ al-miṣbāḥ al-dāll ʿalā sabīl al-najāḥ*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, p. 251; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 55 and 71; idem, *Fiqh al-risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 90, 101 and 146; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 180, 181–184, 190, 197; idem, *Risālat al-bayān li ahl al-ʿuqūl waʾl-adhhān*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, p. 283; idem, *Risālat al-ḥurūf*, ibid., p. 336; ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 4, p. 203; ʿAlīżal-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, p. 282; al-Ṭabarānī, *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*, in Rudolph Strothmann, ed., 'Festkalender der Nusairier', *Der Islam*, 27 (1946), index. The list of references is far from exhaustive.

number of texts attributed to him, including works of 'extremist' content such as *Kitāb al-haft*, and rationalist theological writings of possibly Muʿtazilīprovenance.

Writing about Mufaḍḍal's life is a far from straightforward task as the source material on him is fragmentary and scant. There are just two notes in the biographical dictionaries of al-Najāshīand Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī(early 5th/11th century), and he is briefly mentioned in the bio-bibliographic works of al-Barqī(d. between 274 and 280/887 and 894), al-Ṭūsī(d. 460/1067), and Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192), and in the work of al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).[15] Other than that, all the information we have on him are a few dozen *ḥadīth* found in the four canonical Imāmīcollections, compiled by al-Kulaynī(d. 329/940), Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and al-Ṭūsī(d. 460/1067), and in several other compilations.[16]

The two biographical reports are rather sketchy and do not tell us much beyond the general Imāmītropes used to condemn the Ghulat. Al-Najāshīcalls Mufaḍḍal corrupt in his beliefs, confused in his traditions and a writer of unreliable books. Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirīcalls him weak in *ḥadīth*, incoherent, elevated in speech (*murtafiʿ al-qawl*) and holding extremist views.[17] Except for these clichés, the two biographies offer just two pieces of historical information – that he was a follower of the Khaṭṭābiyya, and that he narrated *ḥadīth* from the sixth and seventh Imams, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mūsāal-Kāẓim (d. 183/799).

While the negative characterisations by al-Najāshi and Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirīcan be discounted as polemical tropes used to project a particular religious outlook onto an earlier period, because the teachings of Mufaḍḍal were too 'extreme' to be acceptable to Twelver orthodoxy,[18] Mufaḍḍal's closeness to the Imams and his involvement with the Khaṭṭābiyya deserve attention. Both are confirmed by *ḥadīth*

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[15] Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 288, Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Āl Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (Beirut, n.d.), p. 124.

[16] These collections are Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. ʿAlīAkbar al-Ghaffārī (Beirut, 1410/1990), *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, ed. Faḍl Allāh al-Ṭabāṭabāʾīal-Yazdī(Qum, n.d.), and *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Hāshim al-Ḥusaynīal-Tihrānī(Beirut, n.d.), al-Kashshī, *al-Rijāl*, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsin*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī(Tehran, 1331 Sh./1951).

[17] Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī, *Rijāl*, p. 87.

[18] Cf. Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 22–24.

reports and in the works of al-Ṭūsīżand al-Barqī,[19] and both are illustrative of Mufaḍḍal's position in Kufa: as a close associate of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mūsāżal-Kāẓim, and as someone who mixed with Ghulat and endorsed their teachings. Seen more broadly, they also illustrate a phenomenon relating to the life of the Shiʿi community of the 2nd/8th century in Kufa, that is to say the ambiguous relationship between the Imams and the Ghulat.

The use of *ḥadīth* as a historical source is not without problems for reasons of authenticity and for the scant amount of detail it often provides.[20] Still, it is argued here that the main facts about Mufaḍḍal's life provided in such reports – his close friendship with the two Imams, his dealings in money and his relations with some of his contemporaries – can be trusted. There are three considerations that allow one to consider most of the information in *ḥadīth* featuring his name as historical.[21]

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[19] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Thāmir Kāẓim al-Khafājī (Qum, 2007), p. 90; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 210.

[20] For the earliest critiques of *ḥadīth* as a historical source, see I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1966–1971), vol. 2, p. 19 ff.; J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1967), p. 4 *et passim*.

[21] In his article about Mufaḍḍal and *Kitāb al-haft*, Heinz Halm quotes at length from his German translation of traditions from al-Kashshī's and al-Kulaynī's works that feature his name. He divides them into two categories, calling the first – those in which Mufaḍḍal appears in a negative light – 'Al-Mufaḍḍal aus imamitischer Sicht'. The second category consists of the *ḥadīth* from al-Kashshīżand al-Kulaynīżspeaking of him favourably, and these he calls 'Häretische Mufaḍḍal-Tradizionen'. Unfortunately, he leaves out quite a number of *ḥadīth* from other collections, see 'Das "Buch der Schatten",' [I], pp. 224–235. He also dedicates a short passage to Mufaḍḍal in his *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismāʿīlīya: Eine Studien zur islamischen Gnosis* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 163–165, in which he mainly recounts how this figure is remembered by the Nuṣayrīs. Much more critical and comprehensive is al-Munṣif b. ʿAbd al-Jalīl's biography of Mufaḍḍal in the introduction to his edition of *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 8–21; see also Gerami, *Nakhustīn*, pp. 92–99; on the Yemeni clan of al-Juʿfī, to which Mufaḍḍal belonged, see S. Tavoosi Masroor, *Pazhūhishī pirāmūn-i Jābir b. Yazīd-i Juʿfī* (Tehran, 1389/2011), pp. 35–37. Hossein Modarressi studied the period in which Mufaḍḍal lived, but he dismisses such *ḥadīth* as were put into circulation by the Ghulat – including praise of Mufaḍḍal on the authority of the Imams – as forgeries inserted into 'books written by *reliable* authors' (p. 43, emphasis mine), used by the Ghulat 'to further consolidate their own position' (p. 34). Many pro-Ghulat *ḥadīth*

One is the existence of multiple strands of transmission for some of these traditions, and the existence of so-called 'common links' among the names of transmitters. In modern *ḥadīth* criticism, one operation that has been used to verify the historicity of *ḥadīth* is finding the 'common link', as proposed by Gautier Juynboll. Juynboll argues that if the first half of the *isnād* of a particular tradition is the same in the different versions of the same story, and diverges afterwards, the real originator of the tradition is likely to have been the last person in the repeated part, whom he calls the 'common link'.[22]

The second consideration that lends reliability to this material concerns the religious persuasions and tendencies of some of its collectors. Since the authors of most of the compilations containing *ḥadīth* about Mufaḍḍal were mainstream Imāmīs, it is safe to assume that they would be disinclined to portray a 'heretic' like him as

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were probably forgeries. The same can equally be said, however, in the case of *ḥadīth* put into circulation by their opponents. Before *ḥadīth* can be used as a historical source, and before considering a narrator as reliable, both types of reports must therefore be carefully examined from the point of view of their texts as well as their chains of transmission. However, having dismissed all pro-Ghulat traditions as forgeries, Modarressi builds his narrative largely on *ḥadīth* that exhibit pro-'moderate' tendencies, unquestioningly accepting their historicity. Cf., for example, the story about Ibn Abīʾ Yaʿfūr al-ʿAbdīʾ (*Crisis*, pp. 30–31), where the Imam sides with Ibn Abīż Yaʿfūr against another man who tries to discredit him, cited in al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 213. Not only does Modarressi accept this story as valid, but based on this episode alone he concludes that the Imam '*always* supported him and condemned his opponents' (emphasis mine), while the man's criticism of al-ʿAbdīʾs interpreted as an effort on the part of the 'extremists' to discredit him in the presence of the Imam (p. 31). The traditions where the Imams speak favourably of Mufaḍḍal in the same *Rijāl* of al-Kashshī, on the other hand, are not given consideration.

[22] See, e.g. G. Juynboll, 'Early Islamic Society as Reflected in its Use of *Isnāds*', *Le Muséon*, 107 (1994), pp. 151–194; idem, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden, 2007); idem, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of early ḥadīth* (Cambridge, 1985). For a reevaluation of recent scholarship on *ḥadīth*, see K. Reinhart, 'Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and *Ḥadīth* Study in the Twenty-First Century', *JAOS*, 130 (2010), especially pp. 413–429, and Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa*, pp. 24–34. On the early development of Shiʿi *ḥadīth*, see Modarressi, *Tradition*, pp. xiii ff.; Newman, *Formative*, pp. 50 ff.; for a useful survey of the state of studies on Shiʿi *ḥadīth*, see E. Kohlberg, 'Introduction' to Part 3 of F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, ed., *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law*, pp. 165–179; Dakake's article in the same volume discusses the modes of *ḥadīth* transmission among the early Shiʿis, see 'Writing and Resistance', pp. 193–201.

someone loved by the Imams. So the fact that almost all of the *ḥadīth* featuring him show that the Imams held him in high regard strongly speaks in favour of their reliability. Many of the traditions could of course be fabricated, but the absence of ones stating the contrary indicates that it is likely that there were none in circulation. It is also indicative that al-Ṭūsī, the author two of the four canonical Twelver collections, lists Mufaḍḍal among the 'praised' (*mamdūḥūn*) companions of the Imams, while the famous 4th/10th-century Twelver theologian al-Shaykh al-Mufīd calls him an 'older companion' of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, 'his chosen one', 'his friend', 'his trusted one', and a 'righteous scholar'.[23]

The third element speaking in favour of the historicity of this material, finally, is the religiously and politically neutral content: when a tradition portrays an Imam as cursing a person, there is a strong likelihood of forgery by his enemies. When, however, content which does not display judgement of a person as good or evil (or as a good or bad Muslim) recurs from one *ḥadīth* to another, there is no reason to consider it a forgery. Such is the case, for example, for Mufaḍḍal's dealings with money. In a number of traditions Mufaḍḍal is portrayed as someone who changed money (hence his nickname, 'al-Ṣayrafī'), and otherwise managed it. These details are credible because they contain no moral judgement of Mufaḍḍal as a good or bad believer (or person). In addition, many of the traditions about Mufaḍḍal appear in different collections and are narrated by different transmitters independent of one another.

Apart from the texts of individual *ḥadīth*, the cumulative data provided by transmission chains can open another window into the circle of the people Mufaḍḍal interacted with. It is reasonable to assume that if someone narrates a large number of traditions from another person, he must not only have met him on a regular basis, but must have had a high enough regard for him in order to relate the stories he heard from him. By looking at who Mufaḍḍal narrated from and who narrated from him, one thus gains an additional insight into his circle of acquaintances and friends.

Most or all of the texts attributed to Mufaḍḍal are apocryphal, so they say nothing about his religious views. His beliefs and affiliations

[23] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 210; al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 288.

are, however, reflected in several *ḥadīth*, where he emerges as a follower of the Khaṭṭābiyya, someone who was attracted to the idea that the Imams partook of divinity, or believed in their 'delegation' – the teaching of the so-called Mufawwiḍa Ghulat.[24]

Despite the warm relationship between Mufaḍḍal and his two contemporary Imams, in several *ḥadīth* he expresses Ghulat views and encounters a harsh rebuke from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. This is not surprising, for Jaʿfar publicly cursed and dissociated himself from some of his most radical and politically active adherents, most famously Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb al-Asadī.[25] In fact, Mufaḍḍal is said to have been a follower of the Khaṭṭābiyya,[26] and one of the reasons why Jaʿfar cursed him was that he thought Mufaḍḍal was responsible for his son Ismāʿīl's involvement with the group. In one tradition Jaʿfar says to him, 'You unbeliever, you idolater, what have you done to my son?', and in another he declares, 'If you see Mufaḍḍal, say to him: "You idolater, you unbeliever, what do you want to do to my son? You want to kill him!" '[27] Which of his sons is being referred to these two reports do not specify, but after the first one, al-Kashshīadds this note: 'He means Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar, who was devoted to him (*kāna munqaṭiʿan ilayhi*), speaking of him as of a Khaṭṭābī, then he returned' (presumably to what al-Kashshīregarded as true religion). Whether indeed Jaʿfar's son Ismāʿīl was a Khaṭṭābīis impossible to tell, but there are reports

[24] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 440; cf. also p. 271. Hossein Modarressi (*Crisis*, p. 21 ff.) presents those who divinised the Imams and the Mufawwiḍa as two *successive* phases of the development of the doctrines of the 'extremists'; based on new evidence, however, Chapter 3 will demonstrate that the teachings on divine delegation coexisted with those on the divinisation of the Imams and the Prophet, and that a clear-cut distinction between these ideas is untenable.

[25] Modarressi's explanation that the Imams often cursed those of their followers who deified them 'in order to protect the Shīʿite community from possible discredit by the blasphemies of those groups, [whose] wild ideas [...] could [...] be harmful to the image of Shīʿism', is rather convincing, see *Crisis*, p. 21.

[26] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 398; Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī, *Rijāl*, p. 87; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, p. 13; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 271.

[27] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 269, 271.

showing his connections with 'extremist' Shiʿis.[28] A hint about Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb's views regarding Ismāʿīl, on the other hand, is found in the 3rd–4th/9th–10th century Ismaili author AbūḤātim al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-zīna*:

> Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb… believed in the Imamate of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar during his father's life, but when Ismāʿīl died, they [i.e. his followers] returned to their belief in the Imamate of Jaʿfar.[29]

Ismāʿīl's involvement with the Khaṭṭābiyya, thus, could have to do with Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb's belief in his imamate. Mufaḍḍal, on the other hand, was probably cursed not just for teaching Ismāʿīl some Khaṭṭābī ideas, but for regarding him as the next Imam.[30] After Ismāʿīl's death, however, he accepted Mūsā al-Kāẓim's imamate and remained close to him until the end of his life.[31]

Mufaḍḍal must have provoked Jaʿfar's ire for his personal views as well: when two men asked the latter whether it was true that the Imams distributed the sustenance of men, as Mufaḍḍal had told them, Jaʿfar answered in the negative, saying that no one but God did this. Then he cursed Mufaḍḍal and told these men to curse him and to dissociate themselves from him as well.[32] 'Distributing the sustenance of men' most likely refers to the idea of 'delegation' (*tafwīḍ*) discussed above, whereby it was believed that God created the Prophet Muhammad and/or the Imams, and delegated to them the creation of and care for the world. In another story, Mufaḍḍal and some of his friends find themselves arguing about the divinity of the Imam. Since they were in Medina, where Jaʿfar lived, one of them suggested that they should ask the Imam himself. Before they could reach his door, however, Jaʿfar appeared before them and declared that the Imams were but venerable servants of God who never said anything before He did, and who knew

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[28] F. Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 91–92; idem, 'The Earliest Ismāʿīlīs', *Arabica*, 38 (1991), pp. 216–218, 224.

[29] AbūḤātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, in ʿAbd Allāḥ al-Sāmarrāʾī, *al-Ghuluww wa al-firaq al-ghāliya* (Baghdad, 1972), p. 289; cf. also Ansari, 'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb', *EIs*.

[30] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 273.

[31] Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. Aḥmad FahmīMuḥammad (Beirut, 1413/1992), pp. 168–169.

[32] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 271.

His command.[33] Finally, there is a third *ḥadīth* that speaks of 'Mufaḍḍal's traditions in *tafwīḍ*'.[34]

One of the accusations levelled against the Ghulat was antinomianism, the belief that religious duties were redundant and forbidden acts lawful. How much of the heresiographers' colourful descriptions of the Ghulat's alleged excesses are true one cannot precisely know, but echoes of their claims are found in original Ghulat texts, and these beliefs could have been held by Mufaḍḍal himself. One of the versions of this idea, attributed to the Khaṭṭābiyya and scattered throughout the Corpus, was that religious duties were the names of personalities, and that the duty of a believer lay in knowing who these personalities were;[35] some of the texts further specify that they were the Imams.[36] In this vein, al-Kashshīżaccuses Mufaḍḍal of alleging that, according to the Imam, knowing him (the Imam) freed one from the requirement to fast and pray; and in a letter allegedly sent to Mufaḍḍal by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the latter admonishes him for believing that religious obligations are in reality the names of men.[37]

Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī's religious views in these *ḥadīth* explain why we find numerous Ghulat in his environment. One of them was Yūnus b. Ẓabyān who knew him personally[38] and who narrated numerous *ḥadīth* from him.[39] He was a well-known Ghali of his time with possible Khaṭṭābiyya leanings,[40] and is said to have composed

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[33] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 273; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. ʿAlīżAkbar al-Ghaffārīż(Beirut, 1980), vol. 8, pp. 231–232.

[34] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 440.

[35] Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 37; cf. also al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 51–52; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211; Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhaʿī's *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, literally meaning 'The Esoteric Meaning of Religious Duties', preserved in Ḥasan b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī's *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 172, includes a lengthy discussion of this idea.

[36] *KH*, ch. 12, pp. 39–40, ch. 24, pp. 67–70.

[37] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 272; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 570; in a similar but shorter letter Jaʿfar is said to address to Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb himself, ibid., p. 580.

[38] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 33; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 275; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, pp. 575–577.

[39] Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 47, 328; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 489; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 537, vol. 4, p. 575, vol. 8, pp. 373–374; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 33.

[40] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 305–306, 451.

The 'Religious Value' of Mufaḍḍal according to the Major Imāmī Collections

Number of Narrators to/from Mufaḍḍal	92
Trustworthy	28
Weak/liar/extremist	11

numerous books, all of which, in al-Najāshī's view, were 'confusion'.[41] The transmission chains of *ḥadīth* featuring al-Juʿfī's name provide further examples of this sort of connection to the Ghuat. As shown in the table above, only eleven out of the ninety-two individuals said to have narrated to or from Mufaḍḍal, or who are said to have known him personally, according to texts of *ḥadīth*, are likely to have been 'extremists', twenty-eight were said not to be (the religious views of the remainder are unknown).

The table is interesting, however, not for the number of 'extremists' whom Mufaḍḍal personally knew, but for the number of non-Ghulat. The people deemed in later biographical dictionaries as 'trustworthy' more than twice exceed the number of those who were not. This qualification virtually precludes the notion that they were Ghulat, and illustrates an interesting phenomenon current during the time of Mufaḍḍal. In a period when Twelver Shiʿi beliefs had not yet crystallised, the Ghulat were not a distinct social group and despite their theological disagreements with the wider Shiʿi community they were an integral part of it.[42] Of course, the Imams did sometimes curse and banish the most ardent of their followers, but they clearly befriended individuals from both groups.[43]

Mufaḍḍal's case shows, however, that the Imams could not afford to be too precipitate in dispensing with their followers, even if they disagreed with their religious views.[44] This was partly for practical reasons; Mufaḍḍal, for example, was a member (or possibly the head) of a network of moneychangers who seem to have had considerable

[41] Ibid., p. 429.

[42] On the fluid state of doctrine in the Shiʿi community in this period, see Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa*, p. 15.

[43] Cf. Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', p. 216.

[44] E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in Said Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shiʿism* (Albany, 1998), pp. 36–37.

financial power, collected funds from the Imams' following and were able to regulate relations and resolve disputes within the Shiʿi community.[45]

Another reason for the Imams' tolerance of Mufaḍḍal and others with similar beliefs, however, could have been that Kufa, which was the centre of the Shiʿi community, was distant from the residence of the Imams which at that time was in Medina, and so it was difficult for them to tightly control the beliefs of their followers.[46] Furthermore, a number of people who are said to have been cursed by one Imam appear among the followers of the next, which suggests that they nevertheless remained close to one or more of the Imams – Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi supplies a long list of the names of such individuals.[47]

Until the end of his life Mufaḍḍal remained close to Jaʿfar and his son Mūsāżal-Kāẓim, despite the few occasions when Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq cursed or rebuked him for his Ghulat views or accused him of attempting to subvert Ismāʿīl. After severing his ties with the Khaṭṭābiyya, Mufaḍḍal was reconciled with Jaʿfar and remained close to him and his successor until his death, which was was bitterly lamented by Mūsāżal-Kāẓim.

Mufaḍḍal and the Imams

The close relationship between Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mufaḍḍal is detected, for example, in a *ḥadīth* which describes how he sent his aide Durust b. AbīżManṣūr al-Wāsiṭīżto the Imam with presents or, as in another version, with requests. Two of the three versions of the story have similar *isnād*s, with Muḥammad b. ʿAlīżal-Hamadhānīżas their 'common link'.[48] Little is known about him, other than that he narrated *ḥadīth* from the eighth Imam, ʿAlīżal-Riḍāż(d. 203/818).[49] Following Juynboll's logic, the originator if not the author of this

[45] See my article, 'Bankers and Politics: The Network of Shiʿi Moneychangers in Eighth-Ninth Century Kufa and their Role in the Shiʿi Community', *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 7 (2014), pp. 1–21.

[46] I am indebted to Najam Haider for this insight.

[47] Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', pp. 218–219.

[48] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, pp. 355–356; al-Barqī, *Maḥāsin*, vol. 2, pp. 551–552.

[49] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 329; on Durust, see ibid., p. 159.

tradition is al-Hamadhānī, who in both variants is separated from the original story by two other narrators. This weakens the authenticity of the story. In the third variant, however, the 'common link' is Sulaymān b. Durustawayh al-Wāsiṭī, who could either be Durust himself – the change in the name being due to a scribal error – or his son, which would add to the credibility of the story.[50]

In yet another tradition, a certain Hishām b. Aḥmar visits Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq to ask him about Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, and before he can begin to talk, the Imam repeats al-Juʿfī's name over thirty times and says that he was his second father (*wālid baʿda wālid*).[51] The same words are ascribed to Jaʿfar in another tradition, where the latter laments al-Juʿfī's death.[52] In the first two variants, the 'common link' is a certain Ibn Abīʿ Umayr, who was probably the same person as Muḥammad b. Abīʿ Umayr, a contemporary of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and ʿAlī al-Riḍā who was highly praised by al-Najāshī for his courage in not betraying his fellow Shiʿis when he was imprisoned and tried by the ʿAbbasids.[53]

Al-Kashshī and al-Kulaynī both recorded four variants of another *ḥadīth* showing Jaʿfar's fondness for Mufaḍḍal. Here, Jaʿfar reprimands two men who harass Mufaḍḍal, but to no avail.[54] The two different 'common links' of this story do not add much to its credibility,[55] but the fact that an almost identical story is found with two entirely different chains of transmission speaks in favour of the report's historicity.

The last example that lends itself to *isnād* criticism describes the following scene: once, when al-Juʿfī was sitting with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, then a young boy, entered. Jaʿfar thereupon asked Mufaḍḍal to take care of his son and to entrust him to those among his friends whom he himself trusted.[56] The 'common link' here is

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[50] Al-Barqī, *Maḥāsin*, vol. 2, p. 552.

[51] Or *wālid baʿd al-wālid*, al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 270–271; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 274; the tradition is also quoted in al-Ṭūsī's *al-Ghayba*, p. 210.

[52] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 269.

[53] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 312.

[54] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 270, 275–276; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, pp. 373–374.

[55] These are Isḥāq Abū Yaʿqūb b. Muḥammad al-Baṣrī and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā; the latter was considered a Ghali, see Ḥāʾirī, *Muntahā al-Maqāl* (Qum, 1995), vol. 2, p. 31.

[56] Al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, p. 289; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 308–309.

Mufaḍḍal himself, which weakens the credibility of the *ḥadīth*, suggesting that he might have invented it. Still, the study of all the available traditions featuring him reveals that his relations with the two Imams were very friendly (save for the brief episodes discussed above). And the evidence shows that, even after his death, Mufaḍḍal was still loved by the Imams. He was lamented by Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who called him his close friend (*uns*),[57] while al-Kāẓim's son ʿAlī al-Riḍā spoke of him very fondly.[58] And despite his Ghulat beliefs, nearly two centuries after his death such Twelver authorities as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī still confirmed his close relationship with the Imams.

The importance Mufaḍḍal held for the Imams is better understood when we consider the numerous *ḥadīth* speaking of his financial capabilities and of the services he rendered them. Furthermore, he was valuable not just because he himself was a moneychanger and dealt with finances. As the analysis of all the early Shiʿi biographical dictionaries shows, he was part (or perhaps head) of an entire network of moneychangers who dealt with the Imams' finances, which emerged during the life of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and continued under the subsequent Imams.[59]

The main evidence for Mufaḍḍal's and his network's activities lies in *ḥadīth* depicting him collecting money for the Imam, receiving donations on his behalf, and using the money received to regulate communal affairs.[60] For example, one tradition describes Mufaḍḍal raising a large sum of money overnight through his friends, when

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[57] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 275 and 424.

[58] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 274; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 320; al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, p. 319; the tradition is found with a similar *isnād* in *al-Kāfī* and *Irshād*, and with an altogether different one in al-Kashshī's *Rijāl*, which indicates that even if there is a possibility of copying in the first two (the authors lived in the same period, so either one could have copied from the other), which is still unlikely since al-Mufīd's *isnād* is longer by two transmitters, it is highly probable that al-Kashshī's variant is altogether independent, which makes it less likely that the *ḥadīth* was fabricated.

[59] Asatryan, 'Bankers and Politics'.

[60] Ibid.; for some of the references, see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 273–275; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 209; al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār* (Beirut, 1412/1991), vol. 3, p. 104; for some of the moneychangers in Mufaḍḍal's circle, see al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 105; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, pp. 24–25, 265; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 272–273.

called upon to do so by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[61] In yet others, he receives donations on behalf of Mūsāżal-Kāẓim, or reconciles two people arguing over inheritance by giving them money specifically designated by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq for reconciling those Shiʿis who are in disagreement with each other.[62]

The literary accounts where his and his companions' activities are described are corroborated by quantitative data culled from the biographical dictionaries. An exhaustive study of all early Shiʿi *rijāl* works shows that people with the *laqab* 'al-Ṣayrafī' become disproportionately numerous during the Imamate of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and continued to be prominent during the eras of subsequent Imams.[63]

The importance of Mufaḍḍal and the moneychangers of his circle is not a unique phenomenon. There are numerous references showing that moneychangers in Near Eastern cities in early Islamic times had considerable financial power which they could use to influence politics.[64] What is of interest here is that they acquired this importance especially in the 2nd/8th century coinciding with the Imamate of Jaʿfar. Developments in the history of the Shiʿi community explain this. It was during Jaʿfar's Imamate that the collection of funds from the community of followers was initiated. Under Mūsāżal-Kāẓim and his successors, the collection became more institutionalised through a network of wealthy agents.[65] Given what is known about the Kufan Shiʿi moneychangers, it is safe to assume that at least some of them were these agents who collected funds. This explains why their names figure so prominently in biographical dictionaries among the followers of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the subsequent Imams, while in earlier periods they were insignificant.

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[61] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 273–274.

[62] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 275; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 209.

[63] See Asatryan, 'Bankers and Politics', p. 8.

[64] Such was, e.g., the first ʿAbbasid caliph al-Saffāh's (132–136/749–754) vizier, AbūżSalama al-Khallāl, who was a wealthy moneychanger from Kufa, see Agha, *Revolution*, pp. 39–53; for further examples, see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1964), vol. 4, p. 248; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqir (Qum, 1416/1996), p. 507.

[65] Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 12–17; M. Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shiʿite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany, 2007), pp. 244–245.

The *ḥadīth*s discussed earlier demonstrate that Mufaḍḍal was an important member of the early Shiʿi community in Iraq and a close associate of the two Imams who were contemporary with him. This explains why he made a profound impression on the collective memory of both the Imāmīẓ and the Nuṣayrīẓ communities, and that a whole range of books of both Ghulat and non-Ghulat content have been attributed to him.

Two of the texts attributed to Mufaḍḍal that are known to the Twelver tradition are *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal* and *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja*. Like most of the works attributed to Mufaḍḍal, *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal* consists of a dialogue between him and Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, while *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja* takes the form of a correspondence between the two men. Here, however, the similarity with the Ghulat corpus ends as the two texts contain not a hint of Ghulat teachings but are rationalist treatises arguing against those who deny God's existence, and proposing proofs to the contrary. In fact, *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal* is a Shiʿi recension of a Muʿtazilīẓ treatise, in its turn a reworked version of a Christian text.[66] This is perhaps why, unlike the 'extremist' works attributed to Mufaḍḍal, these two texts were known to the 5th/11th-century scholar al-Najāshīẓ and the 6th/12th-century scholar Ibn Shahrāshūb, went on to become part of the collection of the 7th/13th-

[66] The texts of the two works are preserved in volume 53 of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār*, pp. 57–151 and 152–198, and are briefly discussed in my article 'Mofa al al-Joʿfi', *EIr*. *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* is a Shiʿi adaptation of a Muʿtazilite treatise titled *Kitāb al-dalāʾil wa'l-iʿtibār ʿalā'l-khalq wa'l-tadbīr*, which is attributed to the litterateur al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–869), and which itself, according to van Ess, is an adaptation of the 3rd/9th-century Christian author Jibrīl b. AbīẒNūḥ al-Anbārī's unpublished *Kitāb al-fikr wa'l-iʿtibār*, see J. van Ess, 'Early Islamic Theologians on the Existence of God', in Khalil Semaan, ed., *Islam and the Medieval West* (Albany, 1980), p. 79, note 7; on the attribution of *Kitāb al-dalāʾil* to al-Jāḥiẓ, see H. Gibb, 'The Argument from Design: A Muʿtazilite Treatise Attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ', in Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi, ed., *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, (Budapest, 1948), part 1, pp. 150–162; further on the two texts, see cf. M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindiqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hegire* (Damascus, 1993), pp. 85–87, 100–102. *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja*'s history is less well documented, but the similarity of its content to that of the previous work suggests that it is likely that it was composed under similar circumstances.

century author Ibn Ṭāwūs, and survived to make it into al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* in the 11th/17th century.[67]

Two other works featuring Mufaḍḍal as their author are *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya* which are Ghulat in content.[68] The larger of the two, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, contains some of the main Ghulat ideas, such as the notion of the sevenfold hierarchy of believers (the 'path', hence its title), the notion of reincarnation and transformation, and God's incarnation in human form. Its earliest possible date is easy to determine: in one passage, it criticises the 'religious scholars' (*al-fuqahāʾ*) who are 'the followers of the Umayyads and the ʿAbbasids, like Mālik [b. Anas], Abuʾl-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, al-Shāfiʿī, AbūżḤanīfa and their likes'.[69] The youngest one of these was al-Shāfiʿī, the eponymous founder of the Shāfiʿīżschool of law who died in 204/820, which is thus the terminus post quem for *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*. The *Risāla* is a short epistle, also in the form of a dialogue between Mufaḍḍal and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, about the relationship between God's transcendent form (called *maʿnā*, 'Meaning'), and His names and attributes. Another text where Mufaḍḍal is the main narrator is *Mā yakūn ʿinda ẓuhūr al-Mahdī*, an apocalyptic treatise mainly focusing on what would happen after the appearance of the Mahdī, while also touching upon such Ghulat ideas as the cycles of history and the aeons.[70] An interesting 'vindication' of Mufaḍḍal's Ghulat image is found in *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl* attributed to Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, and is entitled *Waṣiyyat al-Mufaḍḍal* (Mufaḍḍal's bequest).[71] It is divided in two parts and the

[67] E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 187, 226; cf. Ā. B. Tihrānī, *Dharīʿa*, vol. 4, pp. 482–483; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maʿālim*, p. 124.

[68] Published in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 9–18.

[69] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 197.

[70] The text has survived in al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1411/1991), pp. 392–437, and *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* (Lebanon, 2007), vol. 7, pp. 297–335; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 1, pp. 1–35; for studies of the text, see S. Anthony, 'The Mahdīżand the Treasures of al-Ṭālaqān', *Arabica*, 59 (2012), pp. 465–472; C. Turner, 'The "Tradition of Mufaḍḍal" and the Doctrine of the *Rajʿa*: Evidence of *ghuluww* in the Eschatology of Twelver Shiʿism?', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 44 (2006), pp. 175–195.

[71] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl ʿan āl al-rasūl* (Beirut, 1417/1996), pp. 382–384.

first passage features Mufaḍḍal admonishing the Shiʿi community to be pious and to perform the religious duties. As if building on this negation of Mufaḍḍal's Ghulat connection, the second part features Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq condemning the Shiʿi community for mistreating Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī.

Other Ghulat Authors and the Earliest Layers of Kitāb al-haft

There are thus several works where Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfiż appears sometimes as the main narrator, sometimes together with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, but for some of them his authorship can be rejected outright, for reasons of dating[72] and content.[73] Others, however, including parts of *Kitāb al-haft*, are the work if not of his own pen, then of the literary and religious environment in which he lived. In fact, some of his associates also appear as narrators (or authors) of Ghulat texts or fragments. (The distinction between a 'narrator' and an 'author' in regard to the Corpus is not always clear.) One of Mufaḍḍal's contemporaries was Yūnus b. Ẓabyān, who is condemned in Twelver literature as an ardent Ghali: he is known to have called Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb 'God's messenger', to have claimed to have heard the voice of God,[74] and to have written works which were criticised by al-Najāshī.[75] He mixed with other Ghulat, including al-Juʿfī,[76] from whom he narrated numerous traditions.[77] The Imāmīżtheologian, Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrīż(d. 260/874), labelled Yūnus, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, Muḥammad b. Sinān, as well as two others,[78] 'the famous liars'.[79] Al-Nīsābūrīżwas

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[72] Such as *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *Mā yakūn ʿinda ẓuhūr al-Mahdī*.

[73] Such as *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal* and *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja*.

[74] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 305.

[75] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 429.

[76] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 33; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 275; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 415.

[77] See, e.g., Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 47, 328; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 537, vol. 4, p. 575, vol. 8, pp. 373–374; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 33.

[78] These are Yazīd al-Ṣāʾigh and AbūżSumayna Muḥammad b. ʿAlīżal-Ṣayrafī, on the latter see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 451.

[79] Ibid.

known for his polemics against the Mufawwiḍa and other Ghulat,[80] which explains his dislike of these individuals.[81]

Yūnus's name is connected to Mufaḍḍal's, and to the early Ghulat written environment in another way. Firstly, the majority of the surviving fragments of another work featuring the *aẓilla*, the aforementioned *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, are related on the authority of Yūnus b. Ẓabyān from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[82] Secondly, at the very beginning of *Kitāb al-haft* Yūnus appears in the company of al-Juʿfīż in the context of the creation story involving the *ashbāḥ* and *aẓilla*.[83] In neither of these instances is the occurrence of his name certain to be historical. But both *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and sections of *Kitāb al-haft* form part of a larger group of writings about shadows and apparitions that are attributed to individuals living in Kufa in the same period as Yūnus and Mufaḍḍal.

The best known, and arguably the most prolific of these individuals, was Mufaḍḍal's younger contemporary and the second 'famous liar' mentioned by Faḍl, Muḥammad b. Sinān. He was a non-Arab convert to Islam (*mawlā*) from Kufa, who was known for his 'extremist' beliefs and wrote several books. Al-Najāshīżgives the titles of several of his writings which have not survived and none of which give any indication of Ghulat content.[84] The title of one other work, however, brings Muḥammad b. Sinān closer to the environment in which parts

[80] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 448–449; see also T. Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrīż(d. 260A.H./874 A.D.)', *BSOAS*, 64 (2002), pp. 204–205.

[81] Specifically, he opposed a group that attributed miraculous qualities to Muhammad, and wrote a treatise called *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-ghāliya al-muḥammadiyya* (The Book of Refutation of the Muḥammadiyya Extremists), see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 295.

[82] For the full references, see Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 135–137.

[83] *KH*, ch. 1, p. 16.

[84] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 313–314: *Kitāb al-ṭarāʾif*, *Kitāb al-makāsib*, *Kitāb al-ḥajj*, *Kitāb al-ṣayd waʾl-dhabāʾiḥ*, *Kitāb al-shirāʾ waʾl-bayʿ*, *Kitāb al-nawādir*, *Kitāb al-waṣiyya*; note that al-Ṭūsīżwrites of a *waṣiyya* by Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, then adds a list of persons through whom he learned of the book, the last of them being Muḥammad b. Sinān, see p. 337; this suggests that both biographical notes, Mufaḍḍal's and Muḥammad b. Sinān's, refer to the same text, which passed from one to the other; on Muḥammad b. Sinān, see Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 242–243.

of *Kitāb al-haft* were composed. This, according to al-Najāshī and Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī, is *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, or according to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*.[85]

Two more works purportedly written by Muḥammad b. Sinān have been published in the sixth volume of *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*. One of them, entitled *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa'l-anwār*, is framed as a dialogue between himself and Mufaḍḍal, discussing such themes as transformation, the allegorical interpretation of religious duties, marriage and the sacred months, 'delegation' and so on.[86] Another is *al-Anwār wa'l-ḥujub*, which discusses the concepts of *ashbāḥ* and *aẓilla*, and exhibits other similarities to Ghulat texts.[87] This work will be studied later in greater detail. For now it is sufficient to say that it resembles the first and seventh layers of *Kitāb al-haft* and other related works, and arguably belongs to the same written tradition. It is not impossible, therefore, that this is the *Kitāb al-aẓilla* mentioned by al-Najāshī. But even if it is not, it is still likely that it belongs to the same period as the others works on *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* because of its many parallels to them, and may be dated with the rest of them to the late 2nd–early 3rd/8th–9th centuries.

Another text attributed to this author is entitled *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*. It is preserved in numerous fragments in 3rd/9th-century Ghulat writings and later Nuṣayrī texts.[88] Apart from the concepts of the *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*, it contains other parallels to the '*aẓilla* Group', such as the creation of the seven Adams, references to the numbers 7700 and 51,000, God's call to humanity and the rejection of it by some people. It also speaks of God's manifestation in human form as the persons of ʿAlī and Muhammad, and of the relationship between the *maʿnā* and the *ism*. Muḥammad b. Sinān's authorship in this case is rather plausible, firstly because all the surviving fragments of the work in various other texts attribute it to him. Secondly, because Joseph Catafago lists it as '*Kitāb al-tawḥīd* by Shaykh Muḥammad b. Sinān al-

[85] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 314; al-Zurārī, *Risālat Abī Ghālib al-Zurārī*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥusaynī (Qum, 1990), p. 17; al-Mufīd, *al-Masāʾil*, p. 37.

[86] *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 19–64.

[87] Ibid., pp. 65–94.

[88] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 210–211; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 167, 175, 203; al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 25–29, 45, 53–54, 62–63; ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, pp. 198–202.

Zāhirī' in the list of forty 'Nuṣayrī' manuscripts that he examined in Syria.[89] And even if the attribution is spurious, it can be dated to the early 3rd/9th century because the earliest work that quotes it is *Kitāb al-mithāl wa'l-ṣūra*, written probably by Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr in the second half of the 3rd/9th century, just a few decades after Muḥammad b. Sinān's death.

The citation of a fragment from Muḥammad b. Sinān's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* in the text of *Kitāb al-mithāl* demonstrates that literary production was ongoing in the Ghulat circles in the early part of the 3rd/9th century. In fact, Muḥammad b. Sinān is not the only author in this period who is known to have written about *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*. Biographical sources list three other authors said to have composed books with the title *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, who lived in Kufa in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr al-Hāshimī, Abūż Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad Abu'l-Ḥasan Buzurj and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, who will be discussed below in greater detail.

Thus, on the one hand, we have four surviving texts that all discuss the idea of *aẓilla* and/or *ashbāḥ*. On the other, four individuals are said to have written books whose titles indicate a similar content. This suggests that there was a written tradition in Ghulat literature that was specifically concerned with this idea, and helps us situate some of *Kitāb al-haft*'s layers in space and time.

The '*aẓilla* Group'

In his seminal article on *Kitāb al-haft*, Heinz Halm suggested that its author was Muḥammad b. Sinān, because according to al-Najāshī he had a book with a similar title, viz., *Kitāb al-aẓilla*.[90] However, there are two reasons why Halm's proposition does not appear to be correct and the reality seems much more complicated. Muḥammad b. Sinān's book is not the only *Kitāb al-aẓilla* listed by al-Najāshī, and *Kitāb al-haft* is not the only surviving work with the word *aẓilla* in its title. As noted earlier, he mentions three other works entitled *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, and at least two other works discussing the idea of primordial shadows

[89] See his short note in *Journal Asiatique*, 8 (1876), p. 524, no. 7; here, he also mentions his *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa'l-anwār*, see ibid., no 14.

[90] 'Das "Buch der Schatten" ', [II], p. 67; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 313–314.

and apparitions survive: *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*,[91] extant in full and in later quotations, and *Kitāb al-aẓilla*,[92] surviving in fragments. Furthermore, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd says that the Ghulat composed many books on the teaching concerning the *ashbāḥ*.[93] The matter becomes even more complicated given the fact that *Kitāb al-haft* itself consists of at least eleven textual layers of various origins, and anonymously incorporates fragments from two of the other texts. Finally, *Kitāb al-anwār* also exhibits numerous similarities to the texts of this group, including a discussion of the shadows and the seven Adams.

Common Features

The most commonly recurring feature in the three works is the idea of shadows (*aẓilla*, sg. *ẓill*) and apparitions (*ashbāḥ*, sg. *shabaḥ*), which leaps at the reader from the titles of two of them, and is elaborated in great detail in the texts. They form important part of the creation stories in these works and resemble more closely the versions found in *Kitāb al-haft*, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* and *Kitāb al-anwār*, which share other ideas that are missing from the surviving parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, namely, the teaching about the seven Adams and the seven heavens and earths. Therefore, the discussion here will begin with a consideration of the similarities between these three texts, leaving the discussion of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* for later.

1. The greatest similarity between the three texts is found in their stories of the creation. In *Kitāb al-haft*, the first thing that God created was a shadow (*ẓill*), which He made after His own image, and which he then divided into numerous shadows. He then glorified Himself and they glorified Him, He praised Himself and they praised Him. From that praise God made the seventh heaven and the apparitions (*ashbāḥ*), and from His own praise He made the highest veil.[94]

[91] Surviving in two manuscripts at the library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (mss 140, fols 139b-166a, and 511, fols 18a-38a) and in fragments in *Kitāb al-haft* and in the works of two Nusayrīżauthors, see Asatryan, 'An Early Shīʿi Cosmology'.

[92] This work was 'plagiarised' in *Kitāb al-kursī*; on both texts, see Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 131–135.

[93] In *al-Masāʾil*, p. 37.

[94] *KH*, ch. 1, p. 17 ff.

Similarly, in Chapter 25, which it is very likely belongs to a different textual layer, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal that they, that is, the Imams, were created a thousand years before He created Adam; they were souls (*arwāḥ*) around His throne (*ʿarsh*), praising God, and the denizens of heaven praised Him too, then they descended to the earth, and its denizens joined them in praising God.[95]

In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* the creation of the shadows and apparitions is given in reverse order but is still very similar to that found in the previous text. The first thing He made were the believers, whom He first made as *ashbāḥ* before making them as *aẓilla*. He glorified and praised Himself, and the *ashbāḥ* glorified and praised Him.[96] Thereafter He made the *aẓilla*; He glorified Himself and praised Himself, and the *ashbāḥ* responded to Him, whereas the *aẓilla* responded to the *ashbāḥ*, instead of responding to Him. From this error of the believers God created veils and with them He hid each believer from his fellow-believers.[97] Then God hid Himself in a veil which He had named Adam.[98]

In *Kitāb al-anwār*, the shadows and apparitions differ slightly. Here, God made the *ashbāḥ* for Himself (*li nafsihi*), then made them into *aẓilla*, which are the human bodies in which He appears to His creation, or His veils with which He hides Himself.[99]

2. The explanation given for the names of each of these entities – the *aẓilla*, *ashbāḥ* and *arwāḥ* – is the same in *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*. In the former it is explained that the shadows were called *aẓilla* because they were in the shade (*ẓill*) of God's light; the etymology of the term apparitions is less clear: they were called *ashbāḥ* because they are God's essence (*dhāt*); the souls, finally, were named *arwāḥ* because they relied upon knowing God (*istarāḥat ilā maʿrifat Allāh*). In two of the three cases the explanation is based on the acoustic similarity (and genetic affinity) between the name of one entity and that of another, or of an action, associated with it

[95] *KH*, ch. 25, p. 71 (Ghālib, pp. 68–70, which reading is more complete than Tāmir's).

[96] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 1.

[97] Ibid., para. 8.

[98] Ibid., para. 9.

[99] *Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-ḥujub*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, p. 79.

(*aẓilla–ẓill*, *arwāḥ–istarāḥa*),[100] and the same logic works in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*. Here, the souls are called *arwāḥ* because they went (*rāḥat*) towards God as a bird goes towards its nest; or because they find rest (*rāḥa*) in knowing God.[101]

3. All three texts talk of seven Adams and their progeny in seven paradises, under seven heavens, and God makes a covenant (*mīthāq*) with all of them. According to *Kitāb al-haft*, after having created the shadows, the apparitions, the souls and the highest veil, God made the seventh heaven, the seventh paradise and the first Adam, and made a covenant with him and his progeny (*dhurriyya*).[102] He asked them whether they understood that He was their Lord, that He could create their likes whereas they could not create His like, and they said, 'Yes, there is no God other than You', and this was the covenant. God then created seven[103] Adams and for each Adam a heaven and a paradise. The first to accept the covenant was the first Adam, then the second and so forth, hence the superiority of the first Adam over the rest. Then God made a covenant with the denizens of the first heaven concerning the first veil, then with the denizens of the second heaven concerning the second veil, and so on.[104] Along the way, God also created seven lights, each successive light inferior to the previous higher one, and less luminous.

In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, having created the first veil, which was Adam, God made another seven veils from the veils of the human beings, named each of them Adam, and called on the human beings to worship Him through each of the seven veils. God put the first Adam and his progeny (*dhurriyya*) in the seventh heaven, the second Adam and his progeny in the sixth, and so forth, until the seventh Adam, who was put in the first heaven, which is nearest to us.[105] The first Adam is

[100] Because both editions might be corrupt, there might very well be such an affinity in the case of *ashbāḥ* as well.

[101] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 2.

[102] *KH*, ch. 1, p. 18.

[103] Together with the first, they make eight, but the author probably means seven Adams in all, as later this is the number they have.

[104] Only three of the veils and the covenants made with them are mentioned, but one expects there to be seven, following the logic of the exposition.

[105] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 20–23.

the best, and his progeny likewise, for he was the first to obey God.[106] Then God made a covenant with the first Adam, and then made this covenant with his progeny also; then He made the covenant with the second Adam and his progeny for the first Adam and for Himself, and so forth, with each successive Adam and his progeny, making it with the previous Adams and their progeny and Himself.[107] Along the way, God also created seven Demons and their progeny, putting the first, along with his progeny, in the hell of the seventh earth, and so forth, accordingly.[108]

According to *Kitāb al-anwār*, God first created seven lights and seven Adams, and later in the text it says that together with these lights He created seven heavens and seven earths. Then God explained to them what he had made their predecessors from.[109] This recalls the passage in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* in which God explains to the souls, whom He created after the shadows, what He had made them from.[110]

4. The numbers 7000 (or 7099, or 7077) and 50,000 (or 51,000)[111] figure prominently in all three texts. In *Kitāb al-haft*, the shadows praise God for 7000 years, and the entire process of the creation of the world, the seven Adams and the seven worlds, and the making of the covenant with them lasts for 50,000 years.[112] Then it says that God also created twelve cycles, each lasting 50,000 years (though how these cycles fit in the scheme of creation is not specified). Then God rested for the same amount of time.[113] Finally, when God hid Himself in a veil to punish the disobedience of the believers, they circumambulated the veil for 7000 years, repenting of what they had done.[114]

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[106] Ibid., para. 33.

[107] Ibid., para. 34.

[108] Ibid., para. 24.

[109] *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 72.

[110] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 3.

[111] This number is not unique in the three texts; the Ḥarbiyya, according to al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, believed that each of the seven Adams lived on earth for 50,000 years, see *Masāʾil al-imāma*, ed. J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 37–39; cf. also Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, pp. 209–210.

[112] *KH*, ch. 1, p. 20.

[113] *KH*, ch. 4, p. 25.

[114] Ibid., p. 26.

In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* it says that God created seven cycles (*adwār*, sg. *dawr*), each cycle being 7099 years long, and the entire process of creation lasted for 50,000 years.[115] Likewise, after God told the believers about their inadvertent disobedience, He abandoned them for 51,000 years.[116] Lastly, towards the end of *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, it says that before the believers were born in physical bodies they were in Paradise for 51,000 years.[117] The text links the unusual number of prostrations in prayer, that is to say fifty-one, to this cosmic scheme.[118]

In *Kitāb al-anwār*, the believers remain as lights in luminous bodies for 51,000 years, and God remains hidden from human beings for the same number of years. As in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, the fifty-one prostrations are also discussed in this text. The number 7077, too, appears in several places: God creates the world in 7077 years and seven hours; and each Adam and each devil remains with their progeny for the exact same amount of time.[119]

5. The disobedience of the believers, or of the Devil (and his progeny), serves as the material from which God creates something else. *Kitāb al-haft* tells how, from the disobedience (*maʿṣiya*), errors (*zallāt*) and transgressions (*khaṭāyā*) of the believers, God made the Devil.[120] Further, from the disobedience of the Devil God made the misbehaving women, and from that of his progeny He made the state of *masūkhiyya*.[121] From the disobedience of the believers He also made a veil and hid Himself in it, and for each of them He made seven bodies in which they are continuously reborn.[122] According to Chapter 33, from the good deeds of Adam and his progeny God made a paradise in each of the heavens, and from the disobedience of the Devil and his progeny He made a hellfire in each of the earths.[123]

Kitāb al-ashbāḥ presents a very similar picture. From the believers' error (*zalla*) He made a veil, that is, a body, and hid each one from his

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[115] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 22 and 26.
[116] Ibid., para. 5.
[117] Ibid., para. 54.
[118] Ibid., para. 26.
[119] *Kitāb al-anwār*, pp. 70–72, 74, 76, 81.
[120] *KH*, ch. 5, p. 27, ch. 6, p. 28.
[121] *KH*, ch. 10, p. 37.
[122] *KH*, ch. 4, p. 26.
[123] *KH*, ch. 33, p. 87.

fellow-believer, and from the veil that He had made from the error of the believers He made the Demon.[124] Alternatively, from the believers' errors He created seven veils (bodies) for the believers and seven for the unbelievers.[125] From the disobedience (*maʿṣiya*) of the believers God also made the souls of the demons (*arwāḥ al-shayāṭīn*), and from the disobedience of the Devil He created the forms into which a soul may be reborn during *masūkhiyya*.[126] According to *Kitāb al-anwār*, God made darkness and the devils from the errors of the denizens of the seven earths.[127] The wording in the text is confused, and it is framed as both 'each believer's error', and 'the believers' error'. But given the broader context it appears to be referring to the error that all of the believers made collectively.

6. The idea of the death and birth of the believers and unbelievers, and their sojourning, respectively, in the heavenly realm or in the womb in between these two events, is another striking parallel that *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* share. In both texts they undergo diametrically opposed procedures and in both, the soul of the believer during pregnancy remains outside the womb, while the unbeliever's soul wallows in darkness and blood.

In *Kitāb al-haft*, when a believer dies his soul is taken to heaven by the angels, where it is immersed in a spring called the 'Spring of Life' (*ʿayn al-ḥayāt*), dons a luminous body, and remains there with angels, prophets and martyrs, while the foetus grows in the womb. When the term of pregnancy comes to its end, the angels and the Imam take the soul back to the foetus. Having come out of the womb, the believer looks up to the Imam and the angels and rejoices and then, seeing them leave, cries. On the other hand, when an unbeliever enters a new foetus it is taken to the fiery 'Spring of the Lowly' (*ʿayn al-ardhāl*), which makes it suffer and forget the world's bliss and pleasures (*naʿīm al-ḥayāt wa ladhdhātihā*). The foetus remains there for forty days and then is imprisoned in the womb and remains there until the pregnancy is completed. The soul is horrified at the thought of returning to the

[124] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 8 and 44.
[125] Ibid., para. 42.
[126] Ibid., paras 11 and 15.
[127] *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 72.

Spring of the Lowly. But the Imam gives it a push, and it is born crying and frowning.[128]

In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* the process is rather similar. God inserts a believer's soul into its foetus, which is placed in the mother's womb. Having remained there for forty days, God takes the soul to the nearest heaven and immerses it in a spring called the Spring of Life. When the time comes, the believer leaves this paradise fearful and yearning for its bliss, and an angel gives him a push, so his head, where his hearing and eyesight are, comes out first. After he is born, he cries on seeing the angels leave. When an unbeliever's soul enters a foetus, however, God takes it to the abyss of the first earth, into a spring (whose name is not specified), where it suffers for forty days. Thereafter it is placed in the womb where it suffers until the day of its birth.[129]

The commonalities between *Kitāb al-haft*, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* and *Kitāb al-anwār* are now sufficiently clear. All three texts share a number of narrative elements that suggest a common milieu, or indeed mutual influence. In the case of the surviving parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, however, the reference to *aẓilla* in the title and in the text is the main feature that it has in common with the other two texts. Thus, having created the mysterious letters, His throne, light and intelligence (*ʿaql*), 'He made the shadows (*aẓilla*) in factions (*qidadan*) and made them related (*nisba*) to His breath'.[130]

There is, however, another feature connecting *Kitāb al-aẓilla* to the same written tradition as *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*. This connection is the partially surviving *Kitāb al-kursī* which anonymously incorporates parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, and in its own turn is incorporated into Chapter 62 of *Kitāb al-haft*.[131] Furthermore, in Chapter 66 of *Kitāb al-haft* a large chunk from *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* is quoted anonymously.[132]

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[128] *KH*, ch. 33–35, pp. 87–91, ch. 37, 93–96.

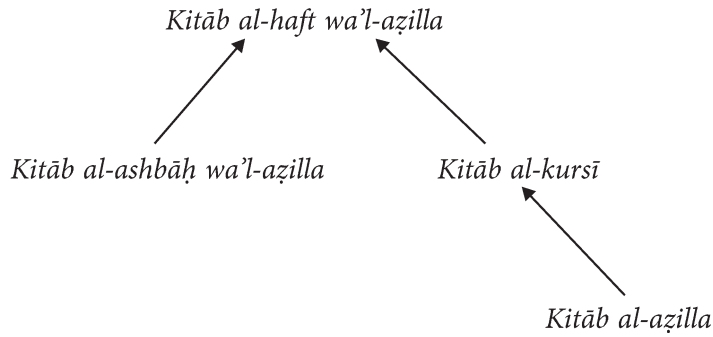
[129] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 67.

[130] *Kitāb al-aẓilla,* para. 6.

[131] See Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 131–135.

[132] See *KH*, pp. 139–143 and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 1–16.

***The Relationship between* Kitāb al-haft, Kitāb al-kursī, Kitāb al-aẓilla *and* Kitāb al-ashbāḥ**



The Authorship and Dating of the ʿaẓilla *Group'*

Kitāb al-haft is narrated by Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī on the authority of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, most of the fragments of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* are allegedly recounted by Yūnus b. Ẓabyān, and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* begins with the words 'Ibrāhīm b. Jaʿfar said'. All three men lived in the 2nd/8th century, and Mufaḍḍal and Yūnus were known for their 'extremist' leanings.[133] However, none of these attributions, but particularly the first two, is reliable. In the case of Mufaḍḍal, because a rather large corpus of disparate writings is attributed to him, with content so varied that it is beyond doubt that no one person could have written it all, any attribution of a work to him is likely to be as spurious as any other. The case of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* is no less clear: this is because not all surviving fragments are narrated on Yūnus's authority, because the book only survives in fragments thus making it impossible to know whether there might have been other narrators, and because al-Najāshī lists four other books with the exact same title attributed to other people (as noted earlier). Finally, the absence of any external testimony makes the attributions shakier still.

Of course, none of the reasons mentioned makes these attributions impossible, but they do call for an investigation. Given that determining the exact authorship of these texts is currently impossible,

[133] On Ibrāhīm, see al-Quhpāʾī, *Majmaʿ al-rijāl*, ed. Ḍīyāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿAllāma (Isfahan, 1964–1968), vol. 1, p. 40.

in what follows they will be situated in the broader context of early Shiʿi thought, and based on that a rough timeframe for their composition will be proposed.

One way of arriving at a timeframe is to look at external, datable, testimonies of the ideas found in these texts, and at quotations from these texts found in datable sources. A cluster of references to the idea of shadows and apparitions and to the seven Adams dates back to somewhere between the first half of the 2nd/8th and the first half of the 3rd/9th century. Furthermore, the earliest possible quotations from *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (both under its own title and embedded into *Kitāb al-kursī* and *Kitāb al-haft*) are found in a text attributed to the eponymous founder of the Nuṣayrīs, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, who died in the second half of the 3rd/9th century.[134]

The earliest reference to the idea of shadows is found in the early 2nd/8th century in the teachings of the prominent early Ghali, Mughīra b. Saʿīd, who led an uprising in Iraq in 119/737 against the Umayyad caliphate. He taught that when God decided to create the world, He uttered His greatest name, then on His palm wrote the deeds of obedience and disobedience. He became angered by the latter and sweated, and from His sweat two seas formed, one salt and dark and the other bright and sweet. Then from these two seas God fashioned creation – the unbelievers from the dark, salt one, and the believers from the bright, sweet one. He then created the shadows (*aẓilla*) of people, and the first shadow that He created was the Prophet Muhammad. God then sent him, still a shadow, to mankind.[135] The shadows of the people and that of the Prophet in this passage are spiritual entities that were created before the physical world, and which would later take on material bodies. Al-Baghdādī's version of the creation myth of the Mughīriyya (Mughīra's followers) confirms this; according to them, he said, God 'created men before their bodies, and first among them – the shadow (*ẓill*) of Muhammad'.[136]

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[134] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 210, 227–229; for a discussion of the reliability of the attribution of this text, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature', p. 132.

[135] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 7–8; for the English translation, see Tucker, *Mahdis*, pp. 62–63.

[136] Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 230; cf. al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, pp. 180–181.

The description by the heresiographer al-Nāshiʾ (d. 293/906) of the beliefs of the Ḥarbiyya,[137] the followers of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muʿāwiya, who rebelled in Kufa a few years after Mughīra, are even closer to the teachings of the '*aẓilla* Group'. They not only believed in the *aẓilla*,[138] but also in the seven Adams, created one after the other, who remained on earth along with their progeny for 50,000 years.

Another datable cluster of instances of the use of the term *aẓilla* are the four *Kutub al-aẓilla* mentioned by al-Najāshī. All four of these were written by Kufan authors who lived in the second half of the 2nd/8th and/or the first half of the 3rd/9th century. One is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr al-Hāshimīż(d. 189/802), who was a *mawlā* and allegedly fabricated *ḥadīth*.[139] Next there is Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's contemporary, Abūż Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad Abu'l-Ḥasan Buzurj.[140] The most famous of them is Muḥammad b. Sinān, who was discussed above. Finally, the youngest of the four is Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, who was contemporary of the ninth and tenth Imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād (d. 200/835) and ʿAlīżal-Hādīż(d. 254/868).

The content of these works is unknown, but there is little doubt that the *aẓilla* in their title is a reference to the 'shadows' of the Ghulat. It is indicative that one of these books is said to be 'of corrupt doctrine' (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī's); the author of another (Muḥammad b. Sinān) was a well-known 'extremist', and that Aḥmad b. Muḥammad is said to have written another work entitled *Kitāb al-musūkh*, which points to the Ghulat ideas of metempsychosis and metamorphosis, and so affirms its author's 'extremist' proclivities.

Another group of references to apparitions and shadows is found towards the end of the 3rd/9th and the beginning of the 4th/10th

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[137] Al-Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil*, pp. 37, 39.

[138] Confirmed by al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 31.

[139] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 225; al-Zurārī, *Risālat Abī Ghālib*, p. 175.

[140] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 247; al-Najāshīżsuggests that he might not be the author but merely its transmitter, which is possible because the list of his writings includes one that is similar to the title of one of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī's writings, *Kitāb faḍl sūrat 'Innā anzalnāhu'* (A book about the merit of the sura *Innā anzalnāhu*), listed among the works of Buzurj as *Kitāb thawāb 'Innā anzalnāhu'*, denoting essentially the same thing (cf. Modarressi, *Tradition*, p. 172). This means that he might have had access to, and transmitted, some of the works of al-Hāshimī, including *Kitāb al-aẓilla*.

century. One is the account of the beliefs of the Mukhammisa by Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī, who wrote that according to them God was manifested in five apparitions (*ashbāḥ*), the Prophet Muhammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.[141] Another is found in the teachings of AbūżJaʿfar al-Shalmaghānīż(d. 323/934), a famous 'extremist' (to be discussed in the next chapter), who reportedly believed in the seven Adams and the seven worlds.[142]

The third and most abundant group of references to *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* is found in *ḥadīth* recorded in the Imāmīż Shiʿi *ḥadīth* compendia and early *tafsīr* works.[143] Although the exact dates and locations of individual traditions are debatable, the dates and places of composition of the compilations that record them suggest a broadly similar chronological and geographical framework. Most of them come from Iraq, and were recorded in the late 3rd to early 4th/9th to 10th centuries, but there is no doubt that they originated in an earlier period. Thus, the majority of the *ḥadīth* are recorded by al-Kulaynīż (d. 329/940), who wrote his compendium in Baghdad early in the 4th/10th century, and Furāt al-Kūfīżwho lived in the late 3rd–early 4th/9th–10th centuries and judging from his name was a Kufan. A smaller number of traditions was recorded by three other scholars from the Imāmīżcentre of Qum, namely Aḥmad al-Barqīż(d. ca. 280/894), al-Ṣaffār al-Qummīż(d. 290/902–903) and ʿAlīżb. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī. And a yet smaller number of traditions was recorded in eastern Iran by al-ʿAyyāshīżin the same period, and later by Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummīż (d. 381/991).[144]

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[141] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 56; on the date of this book, see W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam*, 43 (1967), p. 38; there are two later references to the belief in *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*, but the bulk of the references clearly comes from the 2nd–3rd/8th–9th centuries; nearly half a century after Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh, the Karkhiyyūn family are said to have held a similar belief, see Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1397/1977), vol. 4, pp. 447–448; and in the 6th/12th century, the Isḥāqīs and Nuṣayrīs allegedly believed that the Imams were 'shadows at the right hand of [God's] throne', see al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, vol. 1, p. 193.

[142] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 250.

[143] Cf. Gerami, *Nakhustīn*, pp. 213–224.

[144] Newman, *The Formative Period*, pp. 51, 67, 96; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 29, 33–34, 56–59.

In these collections, the shadows and apparitions are described in similar terms to those of the texts of the '*aẓilla* Group', that is to say, as luminous spiritual entities created before anything else.[145] In some stories they stand for all people,[146] in some just for the believers,[147] and in others only for the Prophet and the Imams.[148] In one tradition, for example, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal that the Imams

> were near our Lord – with no one else near Him – in a green covering, praising, worshipping, glorifying and extolling Him, with no angel … and no living being apart from us nearby; until He decided to create the things, and He created whatever He wished and however He wished – angels and others – then gave the knowledge of that to us.[149]

It must further be noted that the above *ḥadīth* is part of a larger tradition about the glorification of God by Himself and by the *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ*, who in some cases are identical to the Imams, which is found in the first chapter of *Kitāb al-haft*, in the opening part of *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*,[150] as well as in several other *ḥadīth*.[151]

Echoing *Kitāb al-haft*'s first layer and *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, some *ḥadīth* discuss the idea of *aẓilla* in the context of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) that God made with the Shiʿa or with all humanity. At the beginning of the creation, while they were still shadows, God made a covenant with them, mandating that they should believe in God, be faithful to the Imams and accept the Prophet Muhammad's mission.[152]

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[145] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 441, 442; vol. 8, p. 6; Muḥammad b. Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāshī, *al-Tafsīr* (Tehran, 1411/1991), vol. 1, p. 282; cf. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Beirut, 1983), vol. 52, p. 309; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu'l-faqīh*, ed. Ḥasan al-Mūsawīżal-Kharsān (Tehran, 1970), vol. 4, p. 254.

[146] Al-ʿAyyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 282.

[147] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 131; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 438; vol. 6, p. 256.

[148] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 441; vol. 4, p. 256; vol. 6, p. 576; al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (Beirut, 1971/1401), vol. 6, p. 55; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāẓim (Tehran, 1990), p. 338.

[149] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 441.

[150] *KH*, ch. 1, p. 17; *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 1–2.

[151] Cf. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 442, 531; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 552; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 40.

[152] For the various iterations of the story, see al-ʿAyyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 207; al-Qummī, *al-Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawīżal-Jazāʾirīż(Najaf, 1387/1967), vol. 2, p. 391;

The term *ashbāḥ* is used in some traditions interchangeably with *aẓilla*, and sometimes with a related but distinct meaning. In one *ḥadīth*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq says that 'the first thing that God created was Muhammad and his rightly-guided and guiding family; they were apparitions of light (*ashbāḥ nūr*) before Him.' When asked what the *ashbāḥ* are, the Imam replied, 'A shadow of light (*ẓill nūr*), luminous bodies.'[153]

The connections between the texts of the '*aẓilla* Group' indicate a common milieu of composition and circulation. Parallel attestations of their most notable ideas, the *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* and the seven Adams, in the beliefs of groups such as the Mughīriyya and the Ḥarbiyya, and in sources with known dates, situate these texts roughly in the 2nd–early 3rd/8th–9th centuries. Furthermore, these intertextual connections between the three treatises permit one to propose a more detailed chronology of their composition and circulation. In the 2nd–early 3rd/8th–9th centuries, the first eight chapters of *Kitāb al-haft* as well as Chapters 33 to 35 and 37, *Kitāb al-aẓilla*,[154] and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* circulated in the Ghulat milieu of Iraq. (*Kitāb al-haft* at that time had not taken its present shape, and it is unclear what the relationship between Chapters 1 to 8 and 33 to 35 and 37 was.) In the first half of the 3rd/9th century, *Kitāb al-aẓilla* was copied by the author of *Kitāb al-kursī*, and the two texts continued to circulate as two distinct treatises, along with *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*; a text attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr quotes three of them separately: *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, *Kitāb al-kursī* and *Kitāb al-haft*.[155] Although *Kitāb al-*

al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 438; al-Barqī, *Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, p. 135; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 146, 509. On the idea of the primordial covenant in Imāmī Shiʿi *ḥadīth*, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, pp. 16, 33 ff.; idem, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology; v. In Twelver Shiʿism', *EIr*.

[153] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 442, 531; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 74, 372, 552; Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAlīẓĀshūr (n.p., 1426/2005), p. 177; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq*, p. 41; cf. U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975), pp. 99–100.

[154] On some additional indicators for dating *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 135–143.

[155] See, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 210 (*Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-haft*, as separate quotations), pp. 227–229 (*Kitāb al-kursī*). In fact, in a later quotation from *Kitāb al-mithāl* this passage is identified as part of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', Appendix, paras 4–5). This reflects the

ashbāḥ is not quoted in this source it too circulated in the Ghulat milieu, migrating to Syria where it first appeared quoted in the late 4th/10th century in the works of two Nuṣayrīżauthors, Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānīżand Muḥammad b. ʿAlīżal-Jillī,[156] along with many other Ghulat works.[157]

It is not possible to date when *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* and *Kitāb al-kursī* (which, as noted, cites parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*) were incorporated into *Kitāb al-haft*. It is clear that the latter's earlier variants were all produced and circulated in the same environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that the three texts would be combined, along with many others, to form what today constitutes *Kitāb al-haft*. The absence of a dialogue between Jaʿfar and Mufaḍḍal in the last nine chapters of *Kitāb al-haft*, where the fragments of these texts are inserted, suggest that they were possibly added to the text only later.

fluidity of the text of *Kitāb al-haft*, which might at some point have included part of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* as well.

[156] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 74–77; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 209–212.

[157] For some of the titles, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 145–147, and Chapter 3 of this book.

3

Polemics and Authority in the 3rd/9th Century

In the early period, the Ghulat mixed freely with other Shiʿis and, despite episodes of mutual enmity, they were an integral part of the communal fabric of Iraq. The Imams occasionally banished some of the most vocal of their followers, but they tolerated others. It may be argued that, in part, this was because they lived far from the Ghulat centre of Kufa, and partly because some of these 'extremists' were valuable to them. One might argue further that the affection of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim for Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī is an example of how economic considerations can override theological ones: it should be remembered that al-Juʿfī was one of a group of wealthy and influential moneychangers whose services were useful to the Imams.

In the 3rd/9th century things began to change. Relations between the Ghulat and the so-called 'moderates' who opposed their excessive adoration of the Imams and the Prophet Muhammad became strained.[1] The 'moderates', who were mainly centred in Qum, proclaimed the teachings of the Ghulat to be unbelief and tried to

[1] In a text of Ghulat provenance quoted by al-Majlisī, the Imam tells Jābir al-Juʿfī that the *muqaṣṣira* are 'those who fell short (*qaṣṣarū*) of the knowledge of the Imams and of the knowledge of His command (*amr*) and His spirit (*rūḥ*), which God made incumbent upon them', *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 26, p. 14. In *KH* (ch. 13, pp. 41–42), true believers, i.e. those who have understood the true meaning of the degrees of belief, become free and are relinquished of their servitude, whereas the *muqaṣṣira* remain bound by these fetters. A fragment from *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn* shows the extent of the hatred felt for the 'moderates'. Its author Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān, narrating on the authority of a well-known Ghali, Yūnus b. Ẓabyān, quotes Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as saying that an unbeliever is better than a *muqaṣṣir*, for when you say to the former, 'Get down!', he gets down, while a *muqaṣṣir* says, 'I rise', but he does not, and nothing good comes from him; the fragment is quoted in Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī*, p. 198. For a discussion of the term *taqṣīr*, see Gerami, *Nakhustīn*, pp. 189–194.

banish some of them from the community.[2] In this period, many Imāmī authors wrote polemical treatises against the 'extremists'.[3]

The struggle between the Ghulat and the 'moderates' became more acute with the crisis of authority in the Imāmī community that followed the death of their eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, in 260/874. In the absence of a living Imam, the community was now divided between numerous groups with different views about the nature of the Imamate. In addition, a number of individuals were trying to lay claim to positions of authority in the Imāmī community. Eventually, the Imāmīs instituted the office of deputyship (*sifāra*), whereby a special deputy (*safīr*, pl. *sufarāʾ*) oversaw the affairs of the community and collected donations on behalf of their Hidden Imam, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's son who reportedly went into concealment (*ghayba*) upon the death of his father.[4] The authority of these deputies was not uncontested, however, as several of the Ghulat also advanced claims to be representatives of the Hidden Imam. This in turn provoked a reaction from the *sufarāʾ*. The term which these Ghulat used to denote themselves as the representatives of the Imams was *bāb*, literally 'gate'.[5]

This was not a specifically Ghulat term. It was current in various circles at that period and denoted representatives of the divinity on earth in general, while it was sometimes applied specifically to the

[2] Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', pp. 225–227; Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 34–35.

[3] Such as the abovementioned Faḍl b. Shādhān, who died in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century, and is reported to have written *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-ghāliya al-muḥammadiyya*; such works were also written by two representatives of the famous family of theologians and administrators, the Banū Nawbakht, see Iqbāl, *Khāndān*, pp. 117, 134–136; Wadād al-Qāḍī has compiled a list of such refutations of the Ghulat, see 'The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature', pp. 316–317.

[4] For detailed discussions of the history of the Imāmī community in this period, and on the role of the *sufarāʾ* in particular, see Abdulsater, 'Dynamics of Absence', pp. 305–334; Najam Haider, *Shīʿī Islam: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 94–99; Arjomand, 'The Crisis of the Imamate', pp. 491–515; Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 40 ff.

[5] For more on this, see Edmund Hayes, *The Envoys of the Hidden Imam: Religious Institutions and the Politics of the Twelver Occultation Doctrine* (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015), pp. 420–421, 435 ff.

Imams.[6] For example, writing towards the end of the 3rd/9th century al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī dedicated an entire chapter of his *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* to the idea that the Imams are 'God's Proof and God's Gate' (*ḥujjat Allāh wa bāb Allāh*).[7] In one of these traditions ʿAlī proclaims, 'I am God's eye, I am God's hand, I am God's side, and I am God's gate.'[8] Al-Kashshī provides further examples of the use of this term. He mentions two contemporaries of the eleventh Imam, ʿAlī b. Ḥasaka and Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Bābā al-Qummī, the first of whom announced that the Imam was *al-awwal al-qadīm*, lit. 'the First the Eternal', a position presumably shared by Ḥasan b. Muḥammad. Both of these individuals, according to al-Kashshī, claimed to be the gate (*bāb*) of the Imam.[9] The eleventh Imam vehemently rejected these claims, urging his followers to smash their heads with a rock if they saw them. The traditions reported by the two authors display different religious sympathies, the former a more Ghulat-leaning one, while the latter is anti-Ghulat. But the matter of both historicity and authorship is irrelevant, the point being that both illustrate the uses of the term *bāb* in the 3rd/9th century.

According to Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, the first person to claim 'gatehood' (*bābiyya*) during the Minor Occultation (the period between 260/874 and 329/941) was al-Sharīʿī, who held Mukhammisa beliefs.[10] His aspirations were curtailed by a rescript allegedly sent by the Hidden Imam, but other claimants followed, most notably Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, who lived during the lifetime of the eleventh Imam and advanced a claim to be his *bāb* after his death. As a result, he was cursed and excommunicated by the *safīr*, Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān

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[6] D. M. MacEoin, 'Bāb (1)', *EIr*.

[7] Al-Ṣaffār, *Bāṣāʾir al-darajāt*, pp. 94–97; cf. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffâr al-Qummî (m. 290/902–3) et son *Kitâb Baṣâ'ir al-Darajât*', p. 244 (containing a translation of the book's table of contents).

[8] Al-Ṣaffār, *Bāṣāʾir al-darajāt*, p. 94: أنا عين الله ويد الله وأنا الجنب الله وأنا الباب الله؛ in another report, Muḥammad al-Bāqir asserts that the Imams are 'God's proof, God's Gate'; ibid., p. 95; on the *Bāṣāʾir al-darajāt*, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, p. 20; idem, 'Al-Ṣaffâr al-Qummî', pp. 221–250; Newman, *Formative*, pp. 67–93.

[9] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 431–433.

[10] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 244; on his teachings see al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 14–15.

al-ʿAmrī.[11] A few decades later, a well-known Imāmī jurist turned Ghali, Abū Jaʿfar al-Shalmaghānī, challenged the authority of the then deputy of the Hidden Imam, Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938). He expounded the full range of Ghulat ideas and, it was alleged, claimed divinity for himself. However, it is likely that it was because he posed a challenge to the authority of Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ that he was formally cast out of the community. It was also Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ who then used his influence at the ʿAbbasid court to have al-Shalmaghānī arrested and executed in 322/934.[12] Despite this kind of retaliation by the *sufarāʾ*, the Ghulat were not completely powerless in this period as several families among them had risen to high positions in the ʿAbbasid establishment. One such family was Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's patrons, the Banūʾl-Furāṭ. Another was the Karkhiyyūn, so named for their origins in the Karkh district of Basra. This family was known for their Mukhammisa beliefs, and some of them held high positions in the bureaucracy of the ʿAbbasid state, for instance one of them served as a *wazīr* under two ʿAbbasid caliphs in the 4th/10th century.[13]

In this period Ghulat authors continued to produce literature, in keeping with the written tradition they had inherited from earlier generations. There are, for example, two surviving treatises attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. The Nuṣayrī author, Maymūn b. Qāsim al-

[11] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 244; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 78; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 433; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 100–101.

[12] Cf. S. Arjomand, 'Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ', *EIr*; Abdulsater, 'Dynamics of Absence', p. 318; on the teachings of al-Shalmaghānī, see al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, pp. 248–251; al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut, 1424/2003), vol. 7, pp. 466–467; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*, ed. ʿAlī Shīrī (Beirut, 1425/2004), vol. 7, pp. 15–17; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1993), pp. 106–114. To what degree his claims to divinity were invented by later authors in order to smear him is open to speculation; some of his beliefs, however, notably regarding the seven Adams and the seven worlds, together with his antinomian attitudes (see below) are well-attested Ghulat teachings.

[13] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. 4, pp. 447–448; Abdulsater, 'Dynamics of Absence', pp. 312–313; cf. Louis Massignon, 'Les origines Shiʿites de la famille vizirale des Banu'l Furat', in *Opera Minora*, ed. Youakim Moubarac, vol. 1 (Paris, 1969), pp. 484–487; idem, 'Recherches sur les Shiʿites extrémistes à Baghdad à la fin du troisième siècle de l'Hégire', ibid., pp. 523–526; Newman, *Formative*, pp. 17–19; D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat ʿabbāside de 749 a 936* (Damascus, 1960), vol. 2, pp. 514–515; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 12–13.

Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034–1035), cited passages from two texts that were also allegedly written by him, entitled *al-Kāfī li'l-ḍidd al-munāfī* and *Kitāb al-mawārid*.[14] When al-Shalmaghānī was arrested, it was said that it was discovered he had written many books in which he had elaborated his Ghulat teachings.[15] A prolific Ghulat author who was a contemporary and rival of Ibn Nuṣayr was Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhaʿī (d. 286/899), who wrote several books with clearly Ghulat content, some of which have been preserved in sizeable fragments. Finally, it was during the period of the Minor Occultation that *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, one of the major Ghulat texts attributed to Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, was composed; unusually for a Ghulat text, it makes several references to the *ghayba*.[16]

It is in two texts of this period, *Kitāb al-akwār al-nūrāniyya* and *Kitāb al-mithāl wa'l-ṣūra*, that the first historically datable traces of *Kitāb al-haft* appear. This is of interest for several reasons. It illustrates the history of the circulation of this text. More broadly, it reveals the other Ghulat literature which, together with *Kitāb al-haft*, formed a single unified literary tradition, a corpus of texts by authors who freely copied from one another, containing continuously recycled themes and vocabulary. The texts of this period exhibit a great degree of continuity with the writings of the earlier period, notably the '*aẓilla* Group', and with the Ghulat beliefs as described in the heresiographic descriptions of the 'extremists' of the first half of the 2nd/8th century.

The cosmological imagery in the Ghulat literature of this century for the most part continued the tradition of abstract descriptions of spiritual entities and myths of the creation and fall. Still, in some of them one detects traces of events that mattered to the Ghulat

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[14] Al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwī*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3 pp. 49, 53 (*Kitāb al-mawārid*); ibid., pp. 53, 105, 108–115 (*Kitāb al-kāfī li'l-ḍidd al-munāfī*).

[15] Al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, vol. 7, p. 466; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 14; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 106.

[16] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 89, 133, 141–145; while in most cases the description of the *ghayba* is rather abstract, in one passage it clearly indicates the notion of the concealment of one of the Imams, see pp. 204–205. The dating of *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* is reinforced by a mention of Abu'l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, who died in 226/840–841, see p. 197.

community at the turn of the 3rd–4th/9th–10th centuries. One is a reaction to the anti-Ghulat polemics that had increased in the course of the 3rd/9th century. The second is the idea of the salvific role of the *abwāb*, who are described as the highest members of the Ghulat's spiritual hierarchy and now acquired a greater importance than they had had in earlier texts. And, as has been said, one work, *Kitāb al-sirāṭ*, also discusses the notion of *ghayba*. These ideas are mostly described in abstract theological terms, and in many cases no actual individuals are named. However, given the processes underway in the Shiʿi community at the time, the connection between cosmological discussions and the anxieties that gripped the Ghulat community in this period becomes clear.

Inter-communal Polemics in the 3rd/9th Century

One of the earliest traces of *Kitāb al-haft* is found in *Kitāb al-akwār al-nūrāniyya* attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. While the authorship of this book is not beyond question, as is the case with many a Ghulat text, at least in Nuṣayrī circles it was known as Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's work because Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī cites it as such.[17] If this is not enough to attribute the work to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, it can at least be firmly dated to before the end of the first half of the 4th/10th century: a note in the preface to the book states that it was narrated on 19 Ramaḍān 326/25 July 938.[18]

Kitāb al-akwār does not quote an actual passage from *Kitāb al-haft*, but one of its chapters contains a story which has striking similarities to the latter's fifth, 'narrative' layer, and especially Chapters 24 and 41. The story in *Kitāb al-akwār* resembles the ones in *Kitāb al-haft* both in its general structure and in its choice of vocabulary.[19] This degree of similarity suggests that they were either written by the same person or, at the very least, were a product of the same tradition.

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[17] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Risāla al-murshida*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3, p. 164; *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*, in Rudolf Strothmann 'Festkalender der Nusayrier', *Der Islam*, 27 (1946), p. 180.

[18] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 33.

[19] Ibid., pp. 114–124.

It should be recalled that in Chapters 24 and 41 of *Kitāb al-haft* a story is related in which ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb intends to do something illicit, but ʿAlī becomes aware of this thanks to his miraculous powers. He then sends Salmān al-Fārisī to prevent ʿUmar carrying out this act, much to the latter's detriment. But when this happens, ʿUmar calls ʿAlī's actions magic and designates ʿAlī and his family as magicians.

Several key features run parallel between the above anecdote and Chapters 23 and 41 of the 'Narrative Layer'. Below is a table of these parallels, which include both narrative elements and choice of vocabulary.

The examples of correspondences below sufficiently demonstrate that *Kitāb al-haft*'s 'Narrative Layer' was either written by the author of 'The Idol Anecdote' from *Kitāb al-akwār*, or that they were part of the same written tradition, with a uniform plot, characters and vocabulary. In any case, it is clear that the author (or compiler) of *Kitāb al-akwār* was well versed in the Ghulat written tradition since the text contains all the main themes found elsewhere in their writings, including those of the shadows and apparitions, the degrees of the Path, ʿAlī's divinisation, delegation and so on. An element that firmly places this text in the Ghulat circles of the second part of the 3rd/9th century is the image of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, who is portrayed as arguing with Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr throughout the treatise.

One of the most prominent elements of both 'The Idol Anecdote' and the 'Narrative Layer' of *Kitāb al-haft* is the idea that the miraculous acts of God's incarnations were described by His enemies as magic (*siḥr* or *kahāna*). This was apparently a rhetorical device to counter any such allegations, and it is attested in other Ghulat writings as well as in numerous traditions.[20] In several Ghulat texts the unbelievers attribute magic to God or to His incarnations. For example, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, which was written around the same time as *Kitāb al-akwār*, opens with a complaint about this. It says that

[20] In the same *Kitāb al-akwār*, in a report where Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb announces Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's divinity from the minaret of Kufa, allegations of magic are levelled against him and his followers, see pp. 126–127; for a summary of the Imāmī material on the visible miracles of the Imams and the Prophet, and on Abū Bakr's similar response, see E. Kohlberg, 'Vision and the Imams', in Éric Chaumont, ed., *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret* (Leuven, 2003), pp. 133–137.

The Common Features of 'The Idol Anecdote' and the 'Narrative Layer' of Kitāb al-haft

	The Idol Anecdote (Kitāb al-akwār)	*The Story of Salmān* (Kitāb al-haft, Chapter 41)	*The Story of Umm Kulthūm* (Kitāb al-haft, Chapter 23)
Illicit act by ʿUmar and/or Abū Bakr	ʿUmar and Abū Bakr possess idols	ʿUmar prepares to receive a large sum of embezzled money	ʿUmar demands that ʿAlī give his daughter Umm Kulthūm to him in marriage
ʿAlī's clairvoyance	ʿAlī learns about their hidden idols	ʿAlī learns about the money	
The act of becoming aware/making aware: iṭṭalaʿa/aṭlaʿa	Abū Bakr tells Salmān, 'I did not know (*lam aṭṭali*) what Dulām was up to, from what ʿAlī has made you aware (*aṭlaʿaka*) of.'	ʿUmar says, 'No one is aware (*iṭṭalaʿa*) of this except me and so and so.'	ʿUmar is enraged when he learns that Salmān is aware (*iṭṭalaʿa*) of his plan to marry ʿAlī's daughter
Salmān's character	Salmān is ʿAlī's envoy to both men, speaking on his behalf	Salmān is dispatched to ʿUmar to ask him about the money	Salmān reprimands ʿUmar on ʿAlī's behalf
Miraculous act carried out by ʿAlī	ʿAlī makes the wall bend over Abū Bakr (with the help of Salmān)	ʿUmar tells Salmān about numerous miraculous deeds performed by ʿAlī and his family	ʿAlī transforms ʿUmar's daughter into a likeness of his own, tricking him into an incestuous relationship
ʿAlī's or his family's miraculous deeds are described as magic by ʿUmar	ʿUmar tells Salmān that if ʿAlī makes the idols speak, people will think this is magic	ʿUmar tells Salmān numerous stories about ʿAlī's and his family's miraculous acts, as evidence that they are magicians	ʿUmar says that ʿAlī the magician transformed his daughter
ʿUmar's shock, accompanied by a change in his physical state	ʿUmar faints when seeing ʿAlī materialise before him, then faints on discovering that the idol has gone	ʿUmar shudders with fear when he discovers that ʿAlī knows that he owns illicit money, his eyes become bloodshot	Upon learning of ʿAlī's trick ʿUmar is enraged and lets out a scream that shakes the house
ʿUmar's and Abū Bakr's derogatory nicknames	ʿUmar=Dulām; Abū Bakr=Ḥabtar	ʿUmar=Adlam (cognate of Dulām)	ʿUmar=Adlam; Abū Bakr=Ḥabtar
ʿAlī tells Salmān that he knows about his conversation without being physically present	ʿAlī tells Salmān about the conversation he had with ʿUmar before his appearance	ʿAlī tells Salmān that he knows every word of his conversation with ʿUmar (*ḥarfan ḥarfan*)	
ʿAlī or Salmān distribute (farraqa) *the illicit money for a good cause*	Salmān distributes (*farraqa*) the money offered to him by ʿUmar and Abū Bakr among the believers	ʿAlī distributes (*farraqa*) ʿUmar's illicit money among those who deserve it	

whenever God appeared to people in human form and summoned them, and then afterwards appeared to them in luminous divinity, some people, unable to understand this, called it magic and divination because this is what they were familiar with.[21] It then goes on to say that all God's incarnations, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad, were called magicians and diviners. Similarly, in *Umm al-kitāb* ʿAzāzaʾīl and the unbelievers call God a magician and a liar.[22]

Nearly a dozen *ḥadīth*, preserved chiefly in al-Ṣaffār's *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, contain accounts very similar to the 'The Idol Anecdote" and some of the chapters of *Kitāb al-haft*'s 'Narrative Layer'. Here too, ʿAlī performs a miraculous act which impresses Abū Bakr. When he talks about it to ʿUmar, the latter dismisses it as mere 'magic of the Banū Hāshim' (or Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib); one of the traditions even involves the figure of Salmān.[23] The anecdote below is a good example of these accounts:

> The Commander of the Believers met Abū Bakr and challenged him (*iḥtajja ʿalayhi*), then said to him: 'Will you be satisfied [if] the Apostle of God [judges] between us?' [Abū Bakr] said: 'But how can I [see] him?'[24] [ʿAlī] took his hand and led him to the mosque of Qubā. The Apostle of God was there, and he judged against Abū Bakr. Horrified, Abū Bakr gave up [his position] (*rajaʿa*).[25] He met ʿUmar and told him [about that], but [ʿUmar] said to him: 'Do you not know the magic of Banū Hāshim?'[26]

In his interpretation of Q. 74:24, al-Qummī says that 'Zufar [i.e. ʿUmar] said that Muhammad performed magic on people with the help of ʿAlī'.[27] There are other traditions, in which some of the

[21] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 62–63. A similar passage is preserved in al-Khaṣībī's *Fiqh al-risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, p. 123, where God's appearance in human form is labelled magic by some unbelievers.

[22] *Umm al-kitāb*, in 'Ummu'l-kitāb', ed. Wladimir Ivanow, pp. 1–132, paras 164 and 179.

[23] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 322.

[24] This implies that Muhammad was dead at the time.

[25] Or simply, 'went back'.

[26] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 314; for a number of similar stories, see ibid., pp. 316–320, 322; al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimma*, ed. Muḥammad Hādī al-Amīnī (Mashhad, 1406/1985), p. 59.

[27] Al-Qummī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2 p. 395.

characters are changed, concerning allegations of magic against one or other of the Imams.[28]

It is not yet clear whether the parallels that have been mentioned, between the 'Narrative Layer' of *Kitāb al-haft* on the one hand and other texts composed or compiled in the 3rd/9th century on the other, indicate a common authorship. It is clear, however, that they indicate a common environment and place these parts of *Kitāb al-haft* in the divided and disputatious environment where these stories circulated. The aim of such stories was not just to denigrate the first two caliphs but to vindicate those Shiʿis who believed in the Imam's miraculous abilities. Such beliefs must have been criticised and mocked, for roughly in the same period, the author of *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib* says, 'Those who mock believers, mock themselves in Hellfire.'[29] And responding to allegations of magic, one report ends in these words: 'This is not magic but a call by the Prophet's son that has been granted.'[30] It is noteworthy that the purportedly miraculous acts of some earlier Ghulat were branded as magic and trickery by Sunni authors.[31]

Kitāb al-haft and Ghulat Literature in the 3rd/9th Century

More tangible traces of *Kitāb al-haft*, in the form of actual quotations, are found in another work attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. Unlike the case of *Kitāb al-akwār*, the authorship of this text, entitled *Kitāb al-mithāl wa'l-ṣūra*, is more certain as it is quoted in two 4th/10th century Nuṣayrī texts as Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's work: in Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī al-asrār* and in his near-contemporary Ḥasan b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī's *Ḥāqāʾiq asrār al-dīn*.[32] One feature that might put Ibn Nuṣayr's authorship under question is the adoration of Muhammad

[28] Cf. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, pp. 293–294; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya*, p. 256.

[29] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 267.

[30] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 294.

[31] The early 2nd/8th-century 'extremist' Mughīra b. Saʿīd was also accused of performing magic, see Wasserstrom, 'The Moving Finger', p. 21; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 4, p. 326; cf. also Tucker, *Mahdis*, pp. 36, 53.

[32] See, respectively, al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 214 (he cites *Kitāb al-mithāl* on pp. 165 and 200, but does not mention the author's name), and Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 23, 77, 95, 98.

and the lack of any mention of the Imams in *Kitāb al-mithāl*: all the Imāmī authors writing about him assert that he divinised the Imam al-Hādī (d. 254/868), of whom he was a contemporary,[33] and say nothing about his adoration of the Prophet Muhammad. However, the situation with regard to the extolling of the Prophet and/or members of his family was more complex, as will be shown later in this chapter. Furthermore, even if the text is apocryphal, it still was written during the second part of the 3rd/9th century, as evidenced by its mention of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, a contemporary of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. At the same time, it lacks features placing it at a later period, such as the mention of any Nuṣayrī individuals. For the purposes of the analysis that follows, this is sufficient.

The presence of *Kitāb al-haft* in this text draws attention to the type of literature circulating among the Ghulat in this period, and illustrates the broader written and religious environment it was part of, outlining the specific beliefs and, in some cases, the political aspirations of those Ghulat who had access to *Kitāb al-haft* and texts related to it. Some of the fragments quoted here are overly short, but the occurrence of other fragments of the same texts in later works makes it possible to take a fuller look at the literature that was at the disposal of the author of *Kitāb al-mithāl*. For it is fair to conclude that if the author of *Kitāb al-mithāl* quotes one text by a certain author (in this case, Isḥāq al-Aḥmar), he either had access to his other works, or at least they were read and circulated in his environment. The same holds true when he quotes a passage from a group of writings that are thematically and textually intertwined, in this case the '*aẓilla* group': mentioning one text of this group suggests that the other texts circulated in that milieu too. Thus, by looking at the fragments and titles of works quoted in this text it may be possible to gain an insight into the type of literature that was read among the Ghulat in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century.

Kitāb al-haft's presence in *Kitāb al-mithāl* also indirectly indicates the modes of circulation and transmission of Ghulat literature at the time. One detects an environment where a common inventory of texts, containing a common inventory of cosmological themes, were read in

[33] Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 78; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 433; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 100–101; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 244.

the confines of a closed community, whose members abundantly copied passages from works of earlier authors, but were reluctant to show them to outsiders. This observation has important implications not only for the nature of the Corpus, but the nature of its authors and readers as well.

Kitāb al-mithāl contains quotes from some of the texts of the '*aẓilla* Group', from the works of (Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's contemporary) Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, and from several other writings with Ghulat content. The themes that are expressed in the text of *Kitāb al-mithāl* and in the fragments that are quoted in it, include the version of antinomianism which regarded all obligations and prohibitions as metaphors; letter symbolism; the divinity (or miraculous nature) of the Prophet Muhammad; and the notion that God delegated to him the creation of the world. Finally, the most political theme found in them is the idea that the Gates (*abwāb*), the highest degree of the Ghulat spiritual hierarchy, are the sole guides to the knowledge of God for humanity. Over and above reinforcing the dating of *Kitāb al-mithāl* to the end of the 3rd/9th century, discussions of these themes assist in the understanding of some aspects of Shiʿi communal life during the period of the Minor Occultation.

Texts of the ʿaẓilla *Group'*

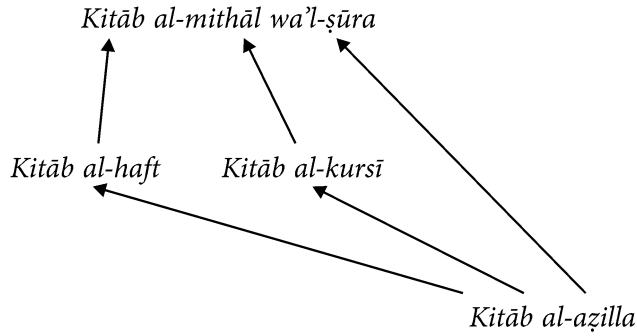
The first thing that *Kitāb al-haft*'s occurrence in this text reveals, or rather reinforces, is its connection to the '*aẓilla* Group'. In the previous chapter the similarity of content between *Kitāb al-haft* and the texts of this cluster was discussed. Here the connection is more tangible. The fragment that purports to be a quotation from *Kitāb al-haft* ('Lord al-Ṣādiq said, may peace come from him, in *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla*')[34] is not found in any of its currently known editions,[35] but in fact coincides with *Kitāb al-aẓilla*'s opening section, which describes how God created His throne on water and made four pillars to bear it.[36] This

[34] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 211.

[35] The chapter of *Kitāb al-haft* that most closely resembles this passage is ch. 32, pp. 85–86, where the pillars are said to be Muhammad, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.

[36] The fragment is part of the creation story found in both *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-kursī*; the larger passage of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* from where it comes reads as follows: '[God] then created His throne on water, and made His words into His signs,

***Texts of the* 'aẓilla *Group' as found in* Kitāb al-mithāl**



shows that one of the versions of *Kitāb al-haft* circulating at that period had a section that anonymously quoted from *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (as it does from *Kitāb al-kursī*).[37] In addition, *Kitāb al-mithāl* cites two passages from *Kitāb al-aẓilla* itself just before the fragment from *Kitāb al-haft*. Finally, there is a lengthy passage from the opening part of *Kitāb al-kursī* which borrows heavily from *Kitāb al-aẓilla*.[38] The diagram above shows the relationship between the three texts and their host, *Kitāb al-mithāl* (the direction of arrows shows the direction of textual borrowing).

His covenant, His agreement, His wishes, His protection, His decision, His command. He made four spirits as pillars for His throne: the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*), the faithful spirit (*rūḥ al-amīn*), the spirit of him who ascends (*rūḥ dhī al-maʿārij*) – who ascends and descends – , and the spirit of command (*rūḥ al-amr*).' The fragment of *Kitāb al-haft* in *Kitāb al-akwār* reproduces the passage with some differences, missing the initial part about the throne. This fragment of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* is cited in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 72; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 207–208; it is also cited in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 227, as part of *Kitāb al-kursī*; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 181; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 80; ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, pp. 273–274; for a translation of the fragment, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature', Appendix, para. 4.

[37] See Chapter 1, pp. 39–40.

[38] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 227–229. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Kitāb al-haft* itself contains a lengthy quotation from *Kitāb al-kursī*. Since that part of *Kitāb al-haft* was probably added at a later period, possibly in Syria during the Nuṣayrī phase, it is irrelevant to the current discussion. However, it shows that *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-kursī* continued circulating in the same environment later on.

Kitāb al-tawḥīd *and Letter Symbolism*

In addition to this, fragments from five other texts occur in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, giving a further insight into the literature circulating during the life of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. One of them is the *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, mentioned earlier and attributed to Muḥammad b. Sinān, which exhibits features similar to the '*aẓilla* Group'. Namely, it talks about the creation of the seven Adams, of God's call to humanity, and of the rejection of this call by some people. It also touches on such themes as the divinisation of ʿAlī and Muhammad, who are presented as the human manifestations of the unknowable God. The fragment cited in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, however, consists of only one sentence about the names and qualities of God, and is probably inserted here to fit in with the larger discussion on the same theme.

In fact, the discussion in *Kitāb al-mithāl* begins on the previous page with a citation from a treatise with the similar title of *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, surviving in two longer passages in *Kitāb al-mithāl* (and in later Nuṣayrī texts). The passage begins with a description of God's first, second and third creations, which are, respectively, His will, which has no weight, no colour and no movement; the letters, which also have no weight and no colour; and then all that is touchable and visible, apparently a reference to the physical world.[39] It then says that the 'name (*ism*) of each thing is not the named (*al-musammā*), and the description (*ṣifa*) of each thing is not the thing described (*mawṣūf*), and that the boundary (*ḥadd*) of each thing is not that which is limited [by it] (*maḥdūd*).'[40] This, in fact, is a continuation of an earlier discussion on the same theme found in the opening of *Kitāb al-mithāl*. It states that 'a name is something other than the named,[41] and all the names of the prophets found in the Qurʾan are not in reality identical

[39] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 209, 225.

[40] Ibid., p. 209; there is a related discussion about the relationship between the *maʿnā* and His *ism*, cf. Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 23; *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya*, p. 12; *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 262; perhaps without understanding the subtleties of the statements, Ibn al-Athīr wrote that according to al-Shalmaghānī, '*Allāh* is a name (*ism*) for a meaning (*maʿnan*)', see *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 16.

[41] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 208: الاسم لغير المسمى.

with the prophets themselves.'[42] This is followed by a discussion of how letters, when they are alone, indicate themselves, but when they are combined in words, they indicate something other than themselves. Which leads the author to discuss how God is known through His names and qualities,[43] after which the short quotation from *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* is inserted: 'The names, the attributes and the epithets are applied to the holy spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*), which is the spirit of the utmost (*al-ghāya*), that is, the veil (*ḥijāb*) of the utmost; and the utmost is the one veiled (*al-muḥtajab*) by the spirit.' [44]

Although this passage is rather short, longer quotations from *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* found in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī's *Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn*, Muḥammad al-Ḥarrānī's *Kitāb al-uṣayfir* and al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī al-asrār* help in better understanding it.[45] Thus, 'the utmost' is said to be God's manifestation on earth[46] (while the phrase 'holy spirit' does not have any Christian connection). The longer surviving fragments also explain why the phrase from *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* is placed in that particular part of *Kitāb al-mithāl*. They contain a discussion of letters in the context of the name of God, which fits with the discussion in *Kitāb al-mithāl* where the shorter version is inserted.[47]

The Metaphorical Interpretation of Religious Duties and Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ

The theme of the metaphorical interpretation of religious duties is touched upon in a fragment from a certain *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* (The Book of Persons). The passage quoted in *Kitāb al-mithāl* is rather

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., pp. 209–210.

[44] Ibid., p. 210: إنّ الأسماء والصفات والنعوت تقع على روح القدس وهو روح الغاية أي حجاب لـ الغاية والغاية هو المحتجب بالروح (the transcription has been slightly modified following a citation of the same passage in al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 203, as it appears to be more correct).

[45] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 25–26, 53–54; ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 4, pp. 198–202; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 167–170, 175, 203.

[46] ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 202.

[47] The interplay between the Meaning and His names and attributes comes to the fore in *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya*, where the Meaning is said to be too great for His names and qualities, pp. 12–13.

obscure and gives little idea as to the overall focus of the text from which it derives.[48] It states that during the time of the Prophet there were seventeen 'warners' (*munabbiʾūn*), and each one of them had stories about the Qurʾan and interpretations of it. The meaning of the term 'warner' becomes clear from a previous discussion in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, which reads that 'any person who warns (*nabbaʾa*) about truth (*ḥaqīqa*) is a prophet (*nabī*)'.[49] The overall discussion is disjointed, but we are in luck as in the next century Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī cited a much longer fragment from the same work, better explaining both its overall focus and its place in *Kitāb al-mithāl*. In the passage cited by al-Ḥarrānī,[50] the Kaʿba, its parts and the numerous locations that are related to the *ḥajj*, are said to be in reality members of the Prophet's family. Thus the four corners (*arkān*) of the Kaʿba represent Muhammad himself, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, while the hidden one represents Muḥsin, who is probably ʿAlīʾs third, unborn son, believed to have been killed by ʿUmar while still in Fāṭima's womb (and whose name appears as the fifth member of the Mukhammisa's pentad in Nuṣayrī texts).[51] The roof is Abū Ṭālib, the Gate is Salmān, the Grand Mosque is ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and so forth.

This reflects the accusations of antinomianism made against the Ghulat concerning viewing religious obligations and prohibitions as names of individuals (*ashkhāṣ* or *rijāl*), and that true religion for them was knowing these names. The Khaṭṭābiyya, the Mukhammisa, and specifically Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, were all accused of adhering to this belief, and the Corpus confirms that such accusations were not without foundation.[52] *Kitāb al-haft* itself has two chapters which discuss this

[48] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 216.

[49] Ibid., p. 215.

[50] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 174–175.

[51] Cf. Asatryan, 'Moḵammesa', *EIr*; Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 387, note 689.

[52] Interestingly, this passage itself, as cited in *Ḥaqāʾiq*, is part of a quotation found in Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, which translates as 'The Inner/True meaning of Religious Obligations', the title of which itself explains why Isḥāq would use it; cf. 'Isḥāq said in *Kitāb bāṭin al-taklīf*: the author of *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* said, etc.', *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 174.

concept quite openly, stating that 'prayer is knowing and performing us [i.e. the Imams], and alms is in us [the Imams]'.[53]

The inclusion of parts of *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* in *Kitāb al-mithāl* now makes perfect sense – just as it becomes clear what the word a*shkhāṣ*, 'persons', refers to. For although it is not easy to make a clear connection between the short fragment found in *Kitāb al-mithāl* and its other parts, the one quoted by Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī displays ideas that find a parallel in some of the parts of *Kitāb al-mithāl*. Here, once again, *Ḥaqāʾiq* is of assistance, since it contains a passage from *Kitāb al-mithāl* which is missing in the currently available edition:[54] 'The five prayers are Muhammad, Fāṭir [i.e. Fāṭima], Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and Muḥsin.'[55] And a tradition listed in the current text of *Kitāb al-mithāl* eloquently states:

> All that God has permitted and forbidden is the knowledge of persons (*ashkhāṣ*). God has made it incumbent upon His servant to know and to follow some of them, while there are other persons whom He has commanded [him] to avoid.[56]

Finally, another tradition states that there is nothing in the Qurʾan and the words of the Imams that refers to real events or objects, but they are all metaphors, persons, meanings and apparitions that in reality refer to lights or darknesses.[57]

In sum, it is safe to conclude that *Kitāb al-mithāl*'s author believed in the metaphorical interpretation of religious obligations. This is expressed both in the original parts of *Kitāb al-mithāl* that survive in the current edition and are quoted in later texts, and in the fact that he

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[53] *KH*, ch. 12, p. 40; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī (*Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 108) quotes a longer version of the same passage of *Kitāb al-haft* that further explains: 'For the command to pray is not about the visible bodily motions and the ways they differ among nations and in laws; their inner (*bāṭin*) aspect meanwhile does not differ.'

[54] Interestingly, this fragment is cited immediately after the similar one from *Kitāb al-haft* in the previous footnote.

[55] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 108.

[56] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211.

[57] Ibid., p. 212; the original reads ليس فيه شيء مما مضى وإنما ذلك أمثلة مضروبة ... وأشخاص ومعانٍ وأشباح وإنه إشارة إلى نور وظلمات, 'there is nothing in it that has passed [i.e. taken place?], rather, these are all metaphors, persons, meanings, apparitions, and it points to lights or darknesses.'

read other texts of similar content, one of which was *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* (and another, *Kitāb al-haft*).

External sources portray the antinomian beliefs of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr and other Ghulat, such as his younger contemporary al-Shalmaghānī, in highly polemical terms.[58] These descriptions are most likely distorted and exaggerated versions of ideas such as the ones described above.[59]

Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhaʿī and his Writings

The idea that religious obligations and prohibitions are names of persons is prominent in the surviving writings of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhaʿī, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's contemporary and rival, who died in 286/899. Isḥāq was the founder of the Ghulat group known after him as the Isḥāqiyya and during his life was widely known as a Ghali. The *Kitāb al-mithāl* cites a short passage from his *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, and a good number of fragments of his works survive in other texts as well, giving an overall idea about his thought. In addition to *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, al-Najāshī lists two lost treatises,[60] while excerpts from his four works have survived in books by the Nuṣayrī authors Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī b. Ḥamza al-Ḥarrānī and al-Jillī, which shows that despite his issues with Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, some Nuṣayrī authors did accord him a certain degree of authority. It is perhaps for this reason that Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī says that Isḥāq's followers, the Isḥāqiyya, were monotheists (*ahl al-tawḥīd*, immediately adding that Isḥāq did not accept the gatehood of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr).[61] Still, there are numerous reports portraying Isḥāq's personal rivalry with Muḥammad b.

[58] Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 78; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 433; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 100–101; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 244; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 17; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 111.

[59] Some of the details in Ibn al-Athīr's and other authors' descriptions suggest that, while possibly distorted, they reflect to some degree what certain Ghulat (and later, the Nuṣayrī) authors wrote. See below for a discussion of this.

[60] The titles are *Kitāb akhbār al-sayyid* and *Kitāb majālis Hishām*, see *Rijāl*, p. 72; al-Najāshī notes that he is a 'mine of confusion' (*takhlīṭ*); Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī confirms that al-Aḥmar wrote books, see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 380.

[61] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 58.

Nuṣayr, and the rivalry between the Isḥāqīs and the Nuṣayrīs later on.[62]

The titles of Isḥāq's other works are *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*,[63] *Kitāb al-ṣalāt*, *Kitāb al-tanbīh* and *Bāṭin al-taklīf*,[64] and they discuss two broad themes, antinomianism and *tafwīḍ*, that is, the notion that God created Muhammad and delegated to him the creation of the world. Isḥāq's antinomian statements are of two sorts. One echoes the idea discussed above, namely, that religious commandments and prohibitions, and some religiously charged objects and places, have a deeper, 'inner' meaning and are in reality names of persons (hence, *bāṭin al-taklīf*, i.e. the inner, *bāṭin*, meaning of religious duties, *taklīf*). He writes, for example, that 'knowing the Commander of the Believers in the innermost meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qurʾan is prayer itself [. . .], prayer in the innermost meaning of the Qurʾan is Muhammad, and giving alms are Ḥasan and Ḥusayn'.[65] In his *Kitāb al-ṣalāt* he equates the five daily prayers with Muhammad, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and Muḥsin,[66] a notion which is echoed by Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, who writes that according to him, 'the inner meaning of the afternoon prayer (*bāṭin ṣalāt al-ẓuhr*) is Muhammad'.[67]

The second type of antinomian statement strongly echoes the accusations of heresiographers that the Ghulat engaged in homosexual intercourse. As part of a larger discussion about the positive and negative aspects of various things, such as singing, Isḥāq writes that homosexual intercourse (*liwāṭ*) has two inner (*bāṭin*) meanings,

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[62] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwī,* p. 59, writes, for example, that those who accept the teachings of the Isḥāqiyya are God's enemies, and that the Isḥāqīs reject Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, see also idem, *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*, pp. 130, 195, 205; idem, *al-Masāʾil al-khāṣṣa*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3, p. 196; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, pp. 34, 58, 63–65; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 34–35; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 9–10.

[63] Different from pseudo-Mufaḍḍal's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, see Chapter 2.

[64] A full list of the locations of the fragments of Isḥāq's works is in the Appendix.

[65] The passage is quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 112.

[66] Ibid., p. 113; later (p. 172), Isḥāq introduces more nuance, stating that 'the first *bāṭin* of giving alms is the knowledge of the Imams, the second *bāṭin* is the knowledge of the Gates, and the third the duty to support one's brethren':

الزكاة في الباطن الأول لمعرفة الأئمة وفي الباطن الثاني معرفة الأبواب وفي الباطن الثالث لحق الإخوان في المواساة.

[67] *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, vol. 6, p. 380.

positive and negative. What the negative one is we do not learn, but the positive one is 'going to someone who is more knowledgeable than you and asking him for the knowledge of the divine unicity (*tawḥīd*) [...] for each believer who is higher in knowledge from another believer is male, and the one who is below him is female'.[68] It might be argued that it was an awareness of such statements that produced accusations of sexual promiscuity and homosexuality from critics of the Ghulat.[69]

The Ghulat during the Minor Occultation

Delegation or Divinisation?

The doctrine that earned the Ghulat the most criticism was that they viewed the Imams as divine beings. Another related belief was that of *tafwīḍ*, or 'delegation', the notion that God had delegated to the Prophet and/or the Imams the creation and care of the world. Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, as was noted in Chapter 2, was himself held to be one of these 'delegators'. Yet a third category of the Ghulat believed that God had been manifested in five members of the Prophet's family, and of them the Prophet occupied a leading role and had dispatched ʿAlī as his envoy. A group with similar beliefs was the ʿAlyāʾiyya, who allegedly taught that God had been manifested in the same five, but that ʿAlī held primacy over Muhammad.[70] Finally, there was a group called the Muḥammadiyya who reportedly divinised Muhammad to the exclusion of any others.[71]

To what degree did these divisions reflect actual (if purely doctrinal) divisions in the Ghulat community? Did those who believed in the

[68] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 167–168; cf. also; pp. 135, 141.

[69] In a similar vein, al-Shalmaghānī is accused of having preached that the superior in knowledge must penetrate the inferior, to allow light to enter him, Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 17.

[70] H. Halm, 'ʿUlyāʾiyya', *EI*2; idem, *Gnosis*, p. 229; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 59; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, p. 307; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, vol. 1, p. 179; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, p. 66.

[71] E. Kohlberg, 'Muḥammadiyya', *EI*2; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, p. 67; some external sources, following the usage in original Ghulat works, use the terms *mīmiyya* and *ʿayniyya*, referring to those who divinise, respectively, Muhammad and ʿAlī, see al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, p. 307; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, vol. 1, p. 179.

delegation of their Imams not preach their divinity? And did those who extolled the Prophet also believe in the miraculous nature of the Imams? (And what did this extolling imply?) Finally, was there a historical succession, whereby one belief was replaced by another? Or were all these classifications inventions of the heresiographers?

In his monumental work, *Crisis and Consolidation*, Hossein Modarressi argues that in the 2nd/8th century a new group of 'heretical' Shiʿis emerged who shared many of the beliefs of the earlier Ghulat, but who introduced several innovations into their doctrines. Instead of directly deifying the Imams and the Prophet, they taught that God had created the Imams and the Prophet and delegated to them (*fawwaḍa*) the creation of the world and the care of it. He also notes that the teachings of the Mufawwiḍa were 'more developed versions of those of the earlier extremists'.[72] Modarressi views these as two distinct groups and the implication is that those who believed in the delegation *did not* believe in the divinity of the Imams and the Prophet and that their doctrines were more developed than those of the 'divinisers'.

Modarressi's discussion of the early history of the Ghulat is very detailed and richly documented. However, neither original Ghulat writings nor Imāmī reports about the Ghulat support his division of 'extremist' doctrine into a 'divinisation' phase and a 'delegation' phase; nor do they show that the latter were 'more developed'. Furthermore, the sources on which his *Crisis and Consolidation* is based are exclusively external ones, mostly heresiographies and *ḥadīth*, and the two original Ghulat sources which were available when the book was published, *Kitāb al-haft* and the *Umm al-kitāb*, are left unexplored. And even the external sources that the work uses at times do not support the divinisation-*tafwīḍ* binary.[73]

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[72] Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 21–45.

[73] See, for example, al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, one of the main sources appearing in the footnotes of Modarressi's work; al-Kashshī writes that the followers of Muḥammad b. Bashīr, a *wāqifī* and a contemporary of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, taught 'delegation' (*tafwīḍ*); at the same time he writes that they believed that Muhammad was the 'lord (*rabb*) who descended through those who are of his kin' أنّ محمداً ربّ حلّ في كلّ من انتسب إليه. The last sentence not only shows that the ideas of 'divinisation' and 'delegation' were not held by distinct groups; it also shows that the 'divinisation' of a member of the Prophet's family or the Prophet himself could coincide with the idea that God

An examination of the original Ghulat sources, as opposed to the neatly classificatory heresiographical accounts, reveals a rather complex picture that defies the categorisations proposed by the heresiographers. Hence the material that follows may appear somewhat confusing and lacking in structure. But then its aim is precisely this: to show that the orderly classifications found in the *firaq* works are simply the result of the efforts of their authors to reduce the subject to order; and that a plethora of differing views about the miraculous role of Muhammad and his heirs coexisted not just in the same period, but at times in the same text.

For convenience, the discussion will be ordered chronologically and start with the '*aẓilla* Group', and specifically with *Kitāb al-haft*, since it presumably represents an earlier layer of Ghulat literary activity.

The first and seventh layers of *Kitāb al-haft*, both of which belong to the '*aẓilla* Group', contain virtually no mention of any of the Imams,[74] while asserting the special role of Muhammad in guiding humanity. The first layer ends with a description of how God concluded the creation and assembled the souls of the messengers, legatees and believers, and composed for them a writ on a luminous tablet, choosing Muhammad as His witness.[75] Muhammad's important role is further stressed by the fact that it states that 'on that day, there was no other witness save Muhammad'. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the narrator of the *ḥadīth*, then quotes Q. 4:41: {What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you as a witness against these people}, once again reaffirming that the witness here is Muhammad. Earlier in the same layer, when the Devil and his progeny refused to worship Adam and intended to harm the believers, God sent Muhammad in the form of lights (*anwāran*), instructing him to guide the prophets and the believers to the right path.[76] The last example, from *Kitāb al-haft*'s Chapter 60, is rather short.[77] After a

descended into one of them. In this case, Muhammad *is* God, who *descended* through his family. Al-Kashshī also writes that Muḥammad b. Bashīr believed in Mūsā al-Kāẓim's divinity (*rubūbiyya*), while claiming to be his prophet, see *Rijāl*, pp. 401–402; cf. also al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 62–63.

[74] The exceptions are discussed in Chapter 1, in the relevant sections.

[75] *KH*, ch. 8, p. 33.

[76] Ibid., ch. 7, p. 30.

[77] Ibid., ch. 60, p. 158.

brief re-telling of the story of the seven Adams, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq states that during the 'great gathering' (*al-jamʿ al-akbar*, probably referring to the day of resurrection), the master of prophets and messengers, Muhammad, will rise.[78]

The three passages thus single out Muhammad from all other messengers as their master, who will rise up on the day of resurrection, and who was the sole witness on the day when God finished the creation. Muhammad is also a luminous envoy sent to the living creatures to guard them against error. In and of themselves, these scant details say little about their larger contexts. The conspicuous absence of the Imams hints at a possible origin of these passages among groups that were known for attributing miraculous qualities to the Prophet. Interestingly, however, these texts neither deify Muhammad, nor regard him as 'delegated' to create or care for the world.

The close similarity between two of the surviving texts of the '*aẓilla* Group', *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, makes one wonder if they have similar views about the Imams. Surprisingly, the latter text contains no mention whatsoever either of the Imams or of the Prophet. A layer of *Kitāb al-haft* that is possibly related to *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, the one which discusses the birth and death of believers, unbelievers and the Imams (Chapters 25, 33–35, and 37) meanwhile, mentions the Imams as God's messengers to humanity who assume physical bodies only in order to be seen by human beings for their edification. Their birth and death in reality resemble the donning and shedding of shirts.[79] Nothing is said about their divinisation, nor, again, about their 'delegation'.

An unequivocal reference to 'delegation' is found in a fragment of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, the third surviving text of the '*aẓilla* Group'. It opens with a cryptic passage[80] stating that that the first created being was Muhammad,[81] and later continues:

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[78] The passage is discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter.

[79] *KH*, ch. 37, pp. 95–96.

[80] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 71–72; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 207; cf. also my 'Shiite Underground Literature', Appendix, para. 1.

[81] This is affirmed elsewhere in the same text: 'God's Messenger said: I am Adam in the esoteric [meaning] (*bāṭin*) of the Qurʾan, I am God's first creation', see Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 45; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 203; Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', Appendix, para. 4.

> In the beginning there was God and no space (*makān*). Then He created space and delegated (*fawwaḍa*) the affairs to him. I asked: 'What is space?', he [Jaʿfar] replied: 'Muhammad, peace upon him.'[82]

The veneration of the Prophet is prominent both in *Kitāb al-mithāl* and *Kitāb al-akwār*; both view him as God's first creature, adding different nuances to this idea. In *Kitāb al-akwār* Muhammad is one of the divine triad consisting of God (*azal*), His Name (*ism*) and Gate (*bāb*). God's name here, as is frequently the case in other Ghulat texts,[83] is identified with Muhammad, while the human equivalent of the Gate is left unidentified.[84] The Name and the Gate were created from God's substance (*dhāt*),[85] and created the world on His behalf.[86] Surprisingly, in the same text Muhammad is quoted as directly stating his own divinity, saying: 'I am God, I am the light of heavens, the heavens are Salmān [al-Fārisī], and I am their light.'[87] Finally, it should be recalled that in 'The Idol Anecdote', which is related to *Kitāb al-haft*'s 'Narrative Layer', ʿAlī is openly identified with God.

The notion that Muhammad was God's incarnation on earth, or His first creation, delegated to make the world on God's behalf, is discussed in great detail in *Kitāb al-mithāl* – both in the original text of the treatise and in the fragments of the works it quotes.[88] Most explicitly, it is articulated in a passage from Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-tanbīh*:

> Al-Makān [i.e. Muhammad, c.f. above] is the creator of things; he is His servant, listening and obedient to God, who created him unlike [how] He created the human beings, but He made him

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[82] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 45; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 203; for the translation, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature', Appendix, para. 13.

[83] E.g. Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, *al-Risāla*, p. 12; *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 163–166.

[84] See *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 128, where Muhammad is openly identified as the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*); see also p. 95, where the author writes that God addressed His Name in the position of *mīm*; throughout the Ghulat texts *mīm* is a code-name for Muhammad, just as *ʿayn* is used for ʿAlī, cf. Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 91.

[85] *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 104.

[86] *Kitāb al-akwār*, pp. 111–112.

[87] Ibid., p. 129.

[88] Although there are some passages which refer to ʿAlī as the incarnation of God, see e.g. the tradition cited in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 223.

> from light – he only appears in human form as a proof for the servants.[89]

Isḥāq expressed similar views elsewhere too, stating that Muhammad created the world on God's behalf, or that he was God's greatest name.[90] Quotations from several other works continue the theme of the adoration of Muhammad.[91] One passage states that 'God created one, and made him His eyes with which He sees, His hand with which He attacks, and His ear with which He hears; and even if they are a hundred thousand, they still are one.'[92] The passage does not name Muhammad, but the overall context suggests that this 'one' is him.

Not all passages that display adoration for Muhammad articulate a Mufawwiḍa worldview. Some simply refer to him as God's incarnation in human form, or someone through whom God is worshipped. For

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[89] Quoted in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211, and in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 45.

[90] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 112; this passage is probably from his *Bāṭin al-taklīf* as it immediately follows a passage that begins with 'Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar said in *Kitāb bāṭin al-taklīf*'; it might, however, be a tradition quoted on his authority as it begins with 'and from Isḥāq' (**وعن الاسحاق**) and is followed by an *isnād*, ending with the name of Mufaḍḍal.

[91] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 210. For Nuṣayrī interpretations of the same idea, see al-Jillī, *Risālat al-fatq wa'l-ratq*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī,* vol. 2, p. 315, which has a detailed explanation of why Muhammad is called *al-makān*, and is entirely about Muhammad's special role in creation, presenting him as a light made of God's essence and co-eternal with Him; see also ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, p. 240; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-Rastbāshiyya*, pp. 37, 56; idem, *al-Hidāya*, p. 230; al-Jillī, *al-Risāla al-nuʿmāniyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, p. 304; idem, *Waṣiyyat al-Jillī li Abī Saʿīd*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3 pp. 42–43; Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-dalāʾil fī al-masāʾil*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3 p. 125.

[92] In fact, the tradition might still belong to the book by Isḥāq, which is cited immediately before this passage. The clue here is the final section, which in the original reads: **فلو كانو المائة ألف لكانو الواحداً**. A surprisingly similar passage is quoted by Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in his description of the Isḥāqiyya, where he writes that Isḥāq believed that ʿAlī was God who dispatched Muhammad to humanity as His manifestation and that He becomes manifest to people in every era; thus, during the time of Ḥasan He appeared as Ḥasan, and during the period of Ḥusayn He was Ḥusayn. In reality, however, He is but one. In one of his books, al-Baghdādī continues, Isḥāq writes that 'if they are a thousand they are still one', **واكانو الألفاً كانو للواحداً** , see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād,* vol. 6, p. 380. Al-Baghdādī's testimony further shows that Isḥāq might not just have revered Muhammad as God's appointee, but that ʿAlī might have personified God. The present passages, however, are silent about this.

example, one presents Jaʿfar explaining that when God says, 'I am ʿAbd Allāh', 'I' refers to Muhammad, but that the true referent of the pronoun is the Meaning (*al-maʿnā*, God's highest, most abstract form); likewise when they say, quoting Q. 1:5, {It is You we worship, it is You we ask for help}, 'You' (*iyyāka*) also refers to Muhammad, whereas the true addressee is again the Meaning.[93]

The concept of the divinity of Muhammad is almost directly stated in a passage from *Kitāb al-marātib*, the central theme of which is the degrees of belief and unbelief, reflected in the title of the work (The Book of Degrees and Stages). Here Muhammad's name is several times used interchangeably with that of God. The narrator asks the Imam what happens when God descends upon the earth to make something happen or to change the law. When the Imam answers that some believers descend with Him from heaven to earth while others stay, he is further asked, 'How many of them have descended in this age with the *master Muhammad*?' In reply, the Imam says that 'in any age and any historical cycle no more believers have descended *with God the glorious and elevated* than those who have descended'. Yet again, in his next question the Imam's interlocutor uses 'Muhammad' instead of 'God':'What is the largest number of those who were with him at any period between the appearance of the master Muhammad and his concealment?'[94] The inclusion of so many passages displaying an adoration of Muhammad in *Kitāb al-mithāl* is not incidental, for its author viewed Muhammad as a miraculous being created before all else. The opening, which is original text and not a quotation, eloquently states this:

> Utmost faith is the knowledge of God from Muhammad, then the knowledge of Muhammad and of his significance for God, and that he is the locus of His names and qualities: the first of everything, the last of everything, the meaning of everything.

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[93] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 223.

[94] Ibid., pp. 232–233. The discussion of the *darajāt* also emphasises the important role of the Gates (*abwāb*), which will be discussed in the section that follows. Another passage from the same work consists of a long discussion of the names God assigned to believers and unbelievers, laudable (*maḥmūd*) ones to the former and blameworthy (*madhmūm*) ones to the latter. There is also a third category, discussed in passing, of neutral ones (literally, 'negligible' *muhmal*), who are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy; ibid., pp. 219–220.

> Nothing comes after him and nothing is closer to Him than he; one may not call him a creature, for [only] God the Meaning is above him. He is the utmost, and the Meaning is above the utmost, and the Meaning the most high made him. On earth he is like the house [i.e. the Kaʿba], and in heaven like the sun, and among the cherubs like the throne, and among the spiritual entities like the seat.[95]

The adoration of Muhammad is attested in Imāmī literature as well. The 3rd/9th century Imāmī author, Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī, is said to have written a treatise called *Radd ʿalā al-ghāliya al-muḥammadiyya*,[96] and although the work itself is lost, there are reports portraying him in conflict with a group in Nishapur who ascribed miraculous attributes to Muhammad, and who believed in *ghuluww* and *tafwīḍ*.[97] Al-Kashshī says that the followers of a contemporary of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, the Ghali Muḥammad b. Bashīr, considered Muhammad to be divine, while Ibn Bashīr himself divinised the Imam; at the same time, al-Kashshī writes, he was of the Mufawwiḍa.[98] In addition, many traditions expressing Mufawwiḍa beliefs, notions of the Imams' miraculous qualities, and the story of the creation of the shadows and apparitions, attested in texts like *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, are found in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus.[99] In

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[95] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 207–208: وإخلاص الإيمان لمعرفة الله لمن لمحمد ثم معرفة لمحمد لو منزلته لله من لبارئه لو أنّه لموقع أسمائه لو صفاته لو أوّل أكلّ شيء وبعد أكل لشيء ومعنى كل لشيء لا لشيء بعده لو لا شيء أقرب إليه لمنه لو لا يقال له مخلوق لو كنّ اله المعنى فوقه. وهو الغاية لو المعنى فوق الغاية لو المعنى تعالى كوّنه. ومثله في الأرض البيت وفي السماء الشمس وفي الكروبيين العرش وفي الروحانيين الكرسي.

[96] Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 295.

[97] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 447, 449. It is interesting to note that according to al-Masʿūdī, the two authors who wrote refutations of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* also belonged to the Muḥammadiyya. The grounds on which they refuted Isḥāq's work, however, were unlikely to have been the divinisation of Muhammad vs. the divinisation of ʿAlī, since in some of the surviving excerpts of Isḥāq's writings, Isḥāq himself writes that Muhammad was delegated by God to create the world, a point which will be discussed later in this chapter; cf. Kohlberg, 'Muḥammadiyya', *EI2*; Asatryan, 'Esḥāq Aḥmar Naḳaʿi', *EIr*.

[98] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 400–401.

[99] For example, al-Majlisī records traditions where one of the Imams claims that God created the Imams before all else and delegated to them the affairs of the world: see *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 26, pp. 5 and 14. The Imāmī traditions about the miraculous nature of the Imams have been extensively studied by M. A. Amir-Moezzi in his *Divine Guide* and numerous articles, such as, for example, 'Some Remarks on the

many cases, furthermore, the *aẓilla* and the *ashbāḥ*, God's first creatures, are the Prophet and the Imams themselves, as in Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's words: 'We were near our Lord, with no one else near Him … until He decided to create the things.'[100]

The section will conclude with a discussion of two texts which refer to the divinity of Muhammad and/or the Imams in more subtle ways than do the statements found in *Kitāb al-akwār*. The second of these texts most clearly defies the classification of the 'heretical' Shiʿis of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries into either those who *divinised* the Imams or the Mufawwiḍa.

The first text is *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, where the divinisation of members of the Prophet's family is articulated in a manner that is not readily apparent and is framed as the notion of God's manifestation in human form. Perhaps to enhance the secrecy surrounding the idea, the veiled statements about the Imam's divinity are here preceded by a complaint about the people's propensity to interpret the miracles of the Imams as indicative of a claim to being divine:

> When similar things [i.e. miracles] happened in the positions of the Imamate (*fī maqāmāt al-imāma*) … they said about them, 'They claim that the Imam', he who brought about these obvious indications and dazzling miracles, 'is God'. They added to this the degree of the Prophet as well, whom they accused of magic and sorcery. They also accused the Imams, [saying] that whoever accepted them and believed in them, also accepted their magic. They also accused the Imam of claiming divinity, and claimed that whoever followed them [i.e. the Imams], worshipped them and rejected God.[101]

Still, throughout the treatise the author of *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* quite openly states that God is manifested to humanity in human form, appearing in the form of various ethnicities and races, but remaining, nevertheless, one and the same.[102] It is His human appearance, in fact, which makes some people doubt the veracity of His divine nature,

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Divinity of the Imam', in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London, 2011), pp. 103–132. The *ḥadīth* featuring the Imams as God's first creatures and the apparitions and shadows, are discussed in Chapter 2.

[100] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 441.

[101] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 65.

[102] Ibid., pp. 134, 176,

stating that He is merely human, as He may exhibit such purely human functions as marrying and bearing children. His goal in doing this, however, is to 'make people feel closer to Him'.[103] And even after He appears to them in human form, people perceive Him to varying degrees, based on their spiritual capacities.[104] The Lord becomes manifest in various persons each known as a *maqām* 'position',[105] some of whom are His Names, such as Nūḥ and Muhammad, through his Gates and Veils, and through the Imams.[106] He can also become incarnate in the form of various peoples and races, and in one place it is implied that Jesus Christ was His manifestation.[107]

Such descriptions of God's relationship to His creation may explain the anger of heresiographers about the Ghulat's deification of the Imams, for it is an easy step from stating that someone is God's *manifestation* to saying that he is *God Himself*. In fact, some of the texts show that this step was taken not only by the Ghulat's accusers but by some Ghulat authors themselves. In one instance in the same *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq openly refers to ʿAlī as 'Lord', and when talking of him employs an honorific epithet that is used to refer to the Godhead only:

> Our master and messenger Muhammad has said: 'Death is rest, and many a dead person is at rest.' 'Death' is one of the names of the Lord the mighty and glorious, as in His saying, {Before you encountered death, you were hoping for it. Well, now you have

[103] Ibid., p. 173, cf. also p. 134.

[104] Ibid., p. 149. At one point, in a set of rhetorical questions posed to Mufaḍḍal the Imam asserts the human appearance and qualities that God may assume: 'If your Lord says about a human being that he is a luminous angel, will this not be a subtle, daunting and difficult thing for you to understand? … And if someone tells you that a human being is a creator lord, which of the two would be a subtler thing to understand and a more daunting and difficult thing to bear, this or the first statement? … And if you are told that a creator lord, who sustains, gives life and takes it, who has the power, the grace, the will, and who creates, that He is a weak human being subject to defeat and persecution, who may be killed or carried from one place to another; where does this position stand between the two?'

[105] See, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 62: 'Whenever God created a position (*mā aqāma maqāman … illā*), beginning with Adam up to our lord Muhammad, peace upon him, these people called him a magician.'

[106] Ibid., pp. 136, 176.

[107] Ibid., p. 130.

> seen it with your own eyes}.[108] This, Mufaḍḍal, is an allusion to your Lord, the Commander of the Believers, His glory be extolled (*jalla jalāluhu*).[109]

The Commander of the Believers, of course, is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Elsewhere the author describes how some people usurped his position, claimed his name, *made companions* with him and *led people astray* from him. The verbs used for the last two actions are *ashraka* and *aḍalla*, which are used in reference to God (particularly the first one).[110] Like ʿAlī, the main narrator of the text, the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, is also in one place referred to as God.[111] Another text in which ʿAlī's divinity is directly stated is *Kitāb al-usūs*, where the father of Jesus is said to be the 'Most High', *al-ʿayn*, which is ʿAlī's epithet.[112]

The text that most clearly defies the proposed classification of the early 'extremists' into deifiers and Mufawwiḍa is *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*. The work purports to describe a meeting between Isḥāq al-Aḥmar and some of his followers, who ask him to tell them about the essence of his teaching. The text that follows, then, constitutes Isḥāq's answer. How historical the description of the meeting is will probably never be known, but it might very well convey the actual words of Isḥāq, or at least reflect the beliefs of his followers, as it has some surprising parallels to Isḥāq's own texts and to the descriptions of the

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[108] Q. 3:143.

[109] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 87.

[110] Ibid., p. 162.

[111] Cf. *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 89: 'Mufaḍḍal said: "I said: O Lord, You have blessed me and Your believing friends with the knowledge of the Path and its explanation. However, when it is time for Your Gate to go into concealment by Your will, what will become of this humankind, to the people of learning and effort, and to their position on the Path?" '; the Gates (*abwāb*) are representatives of God, as is made clear throughout this and other texts, so by saying to Jaʿfar 'Your Gate' Mufaḍḍal implies that he is God.

[112] *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 141; M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky transcribe and translate another passage from the same work (referring both to the only surviving manuscript and to Dandashī's edition), where God is referred to as *al-ʿayn*, see their *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion: an Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden, 2002), p. 55; interestingly, in this passage in Dandashī's edition (p. 146) the word *al-ʿayn* is missing.

Isḥāqiyya in external sources.[113] In a most unequivocal manner, the text states that 'God is Amīr al-Naḥl (a common epithet for ʿAlī),[114] and Muhammad is his apostle',[115] repeating this later on.[116] Muhammad's apostleship, on the other hand, in reality means that he has been delegated to care for the world's affairs, which is also stated quite openly: 'He is the master Muhammad for God created him and delegated to him the affairs.'[117] Thus, *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib* combines a very clear and direct divinisation of the Imam with the notion of *tafwīḍ*.[118] A similar combination is found in Imāmī sources writing about the Ghulat as well, as noted before.

As indicated earlier, the above material has complicated the picture rather than clarified it. It shows a lack of consistency with regard to the types of veneration various members of the Prophet's family were the object of – whether as divine beings, as God's first creatures, His incarnations on earth, or the ones to whom He delegated the creation

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[113] Ibn al-Jawzī writes that the according to the Isḥāqiyya, 'anyone who possesses the knowledge of the people of the House is a prophet' (كل لمن ليعلم لعِلْم لأهل لا البيت لافهو نبي غ), see *Talbīs Iblīs* (Beirut, 1403/1983), p. 23, which echoes the following statement in *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib* (p. 285): 'Through the knowledge of God a believer attains the degree of the prophets' (where يسأل should be amended to ينال). Given that, for the author of this text, ʿAlī, i.e. a member of the House of the Prophet, is God, as will be discussed below, the two statements are nearly identical.

[114] Translated as 'Prince of the Bees', for a discussion of the term, see Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 124–126.

[115] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 265: فا لمه لأمير غا نحل لور سوله لمحمد ل.

[116] 'The Commander of the Believers is his God' (أمير غ المؤمنين لإلهه), p. 270; the author addresses Amīr al-Naḥl as God, saying: 'Oh Amīr al-Naḥl, You are as You have described Yourself by saying {Your Lord is never forgetful} [Q. 19:64]; Lord, do not make me forget Your knowledge, and reinforce my obedience to You, Your apostle Muhammad, Your *walī* Salsal [i.e. Salmān al-Fārisī] and your Names the Imams, by whom You called Yourself; You, Amīr al-Naḥl, are free of them but they cannot be free of You, O ʿAlī (*ʿalī*) [or O Lofty One], O Great One!', ibid., see also pp. 272, 275.

[117] هو لا سيد لمحمد لمنه لا السلام لإذ لا كان لا الله لعز لو جل لخلقه لوفوّض لإليه لا الأمر ا, ibid., p. 281.

[118] However, the author of *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib* criticises the Mufawwiḍa in one place, urging believers to 'reject the Mufawwiḍa who fell short of the knowledge of God' (p. 271). But this simply indicates a difference in terminology. Judging by the overall context of the text, the Mufawwiḍa here are probably those who believe in delegation without divinising the Imams, which is why they are equated with the *muqaṣṣira*.

of (and care for) the world. It demonstrates that at various points all of the above types of veneration coexisted – not just in the same environment and the same period of time, but sometimes in the same text; this is clearly the case in *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, where ʿAlī is loudly and clearly declared to be God, while Muhammad is said to be His delegate. As such, then, the first two points emerging from *Crisis and Consolidation* that were mentioned earlier must be reformulated: belief in the divinity of the Imams and the Prophet was compatible with a belief in their delegation; which implies that the Ghulat (i.e. the Imams' and the Prophet's divinisers) and the 'delegators' were not two distinct groups. The third point noted above is invalidated by the same logic – if these are not two distinct groups, the teachings of one cannot be more developed than those of the other.[119] Even in cases where the ideas of delegation and divinisation are found in two different texts, neither shows a more 'developed' (i.e. elaborate or systematic?) doctrine than the other; good examples of this are *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *Kitāb al-marātib* on the one hand, which say with various degrees of subtlety that the Imam is divine, and fragments from *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-tanbīh* on the other, which proclaim Muhammad to be God's delegate.

At the present state of knowledge, it is possible to draw the following picture: the texts of the Ghulat corpus were produced in an environment where various individuals from the Prophet's family were simultaneously adored, extolled as saviour figures, viewed as God's incarnations on earth or His first creatures, or straightforwardly deified. With no canonised set of texts or regulating clergy, the belief system of the Ghulat was fluid, and the persons viewed as the loci of God's charisma unfixed, switching from Muhammad to ʿAlī to all the Imams. Similarly the ideas about what exactly being a locus of divine charisma implied was not fixed and so the adoration of these persons took various forms and was expressed in a diverse vocabulary. This meant that shades of meaning changed, not just between different texts, but even within one and same text.

The apparent fluidity of doctrine in Ghulat texts must not be attributed to randomness or a lack of systematic reasoning on the part of their authors. Bruce Lincoln has argued that the logic of 'changes in

[119] Cf. Gerami, *Nakhustīn*, p. 158.

the ranking of categories between the beginning of the text and its dénouement' may be suggestive of the interests of the social groups that were advanced in the texts.'[120] Were more information on the social environment in which the Ghulat texts circulated to come to light, this would be a fascinating topic to pursue further.

The Crisis of Authority and the Role of the Gates

During the crisis of leadership in the Imāmī community that followed the death of their eleventh Imam in 260/874 various individuals tried to fill the emergent power vacuum, endeavouring to assert their authority by claiming to be in contact with the Hidden Imam. Among these individuals were several Ghulat, most notably Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, whose attempts to gain power involved claims to be the Gate of the divine Imam.[121] It is in this context that the ample references to the *abwāb* found in *Kitāb al-akwār*, *Kitāb al-mithāl* and other Ghulat texts produced in this period must be considered. The notion of *abwāb*, as the final stage in the spiritual hierarchy of believers, was not new. It had been discussed in earlier texts as well, but there the *bāb* is just one of a series of seven steps leading a believer to God.[122] The great emphasis on the *abwāb* as the sole guides of humanity occurs in the Ghulat texts of the late 3rd/9th century, where they often appear on their own, outside the context of the sevenfold 'Path'. This section will study these references against the backdrop of what was happening in the Imāmī community at the time.

The *Kitāb al-akwār* consists of two parts, a series of dialogues between Muḥammad b. Jundab and Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, with Isḥāq al-Aḥmar making an occasional appearance; and a theological discussion about God (called throughout *al-azal*, 'the Eternal One'), His Name and His Gate.[123] In the two dialogues the office of the Gate

[120] Bruce Lincoln, 'How to Read a Religious Text', in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago, 2012), pp. 9 ff.

[121] The three others were the abovementioned ʿAlī b. Ḥasaka, Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qummī and al-Sharīʿī.

[122] E.g., Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 86; *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 16 and 37.

[123] It is possible that the theological discussion is older than the dialogues, which are used as a framework for the former: the two layers do not follow one another in a

is several times openly assigned to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. In a chapter entitled 'On the Clarification of Abū Shuʿayb [Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr]'s Gatehood and the Lack of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's knowledge', Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr declares, 'I am God's Gate.'[124] At the same time, in this chapter, and in other parts of the text, he is depicted in conflict with Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, who was apparently envious of his position; at one point, he is said to have stormed out of an assembly, exclaiming: 'They will not leave Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr until they embrace him as God!'[125] On the other hand, throughout the text, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr speaks with contempt of Isḥāq's knowledge or criticises him for speaking 'without permission'.[126]

The theoretical discussion of *Kitāb al-akwār* revolves around the creation of the world, and the relationship between God, the Name[127]

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linear way, but chunks of the theoretical discussion are framed by the dialogues. The entire text is framed in such a way that Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's role in it is in part to explain *Kitāb al-akwār* to Muḥammad b. Jundab. A fact that reinforces the hypothesis that the theoretical part is earlier than the dialogues, is that the book opens with Muḥammad b. Jundab's statement that he 'heard *Kitāb al-akwār* from Isḥāq al-Aḥmar (p. 33)'. Furthermore, in one of the later dialogues, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr refers to a book in Muḥammad Jundab's hands as '*Kitāb al-kawr wa'l-dawr* by Muḥammad b. Sinān' (p. 75); presumably the title refers to *Kitāb al-akwār*. The following picture emerges: Muḥammad b. Jundab heard an explanation of *Kitāb al-akwār* from Isḥāq, then told Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr about it, and this was followed by the latter's own lengthy explanation.

[124] The original reads: أنا الباب لا إله إلا, pp. 62–63.

[125] لا يزالون بمحمد بن نصير حتى يتخذوه ربا, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 75, cf. also pp. 91, 204.

[126] Ibid. pp. 55, 58, 65; elsewhere (p. 63), Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr elucidates a book for Muḥammad b. Jundab about which Isḥāq had previously spoken to him, and after each explanation adds, 'This is what Isḥāq has not explained and made apparent to you.'

[127] Ibid., p. 57; the Name appears to be Muhammad since in one passage, having created the world in six days, God speaks through 'the person of *mīm* [i.e. Muhammad], who said: {We created the heavens and the earth in six Days without tiring [Q. 50:38]}.' Here, 'we' might refer to *mīm* and God, or just to *mīm*, who in this case would be speaking on his own behalf, which would imply greater agency for him in the creation of the world. Note that the Qurʾanic verse has been modified (or the quotation comes from an alternative Qurʾanic codex: ولقد خلقنا السموات والأرض في ستة أيام وما مسنا من لغوب). *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* is another text where the Qurʾanic verses cited do not always conform to the canonical codex. There are at least two manuscripts of it, one is MS Arabe 1449, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fols 86a-182a, on which both Ibn ʿAbd al-Jalīl's and Capezzone's editions are based, and the other is an unidentified

and the Gate. The latter two are God's first creations, and the Name is superior to the Gate, although they are of the same substance (*dhāt*), which they also share with God. In fact, God may appear to His creation in the substance of the Name and the Gate, while the Name may appear in the substance of the Gate.[128] Some passages contain highly elaborate descriptions of how the Name and the Gate create on God's behalf, which is a clearly Mufawwiḍa idea.[129] Almost at the very end of *Kitāb al-akwār* the author writes that 'the Gate is the sun and the guide of the luminous world, he is the guide of the human world'.[130] When compared to other parts of the text this passage is somewhat unusual in that it stresses the Gate's role in guiding humanity, a subject that is not touched upon earlier in the text.

The role of the Gates as the guides of humanity is explicitly discussed, in *Kitāb al-mithāl*, in a lengthy fragment that is taken from *Kitāb al-marātib*, mentioned earlier, and placed at the end of the text. Following on from the common Ghulat theme of the creation, it speaks of God's call to humanity, to which some respond and which some reject. Thereafter God divides those who have responded to His call according to their degrees of belief, and those who have refused to respond according to their degrees of unbelief – both groups in order of precedence. Thus the first to respond are assigned the highest degree of belief, that of the Gates,[131] followed by the remaining ones. These degrees occur more or less in the same order in numerous other texts, but the emphasis placed on the *abwāb* here is unusual. At the very end of the passage, the Gates are assigned extra importance in much more concrete terms:

> The highest of the degrees and the closest to God as a means are the Gates; only through them has God made it possible to achieve

MS that forms the basis for the edition in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 95–166. While the two editors of MS Arabe 1449 make the Qurʾanic verses quoted in the text conform to the canonical codex, the MS itself shows a large number of 'deviations', not all of which seem to be scribal errors; e.g. the second part of Q. 72:3 appears in the MS as لم يتخذ صاحبة ولا ولدا (instead of ما اتخذ), see fol. 101a.

[128] *Kitāb al-akwār*, pp. 95–96, 104–105, 107, 109–110, 129–131, 150.

[129] Ibid., pp. 111–112; for a detailed discussion of the passage, see the subsection on the Mufawwiḍa in the next chapter.

[130] Ibid., p. 200.

[131] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 230.

> complete knowledge of Him and [to reach] His truth. He trusts them with His revelation, and He has commanded that no one should try to reach Him except through them. The Glorified and Most High One said, 'Goodness does not consist of entering houses from the back; the truly good person is the one who is mindful of God. So enter your houses by their Gates and be mindful of God so that you may prosper.'[132] His words 'Goodness does not consist of entering houses from the back (*ẓuhūr*)' refers to the knowledge and people of the externals (*ẓāhir*), who attribute to God His external words and deeds[133] [only], without embracing, affirming or desiring Him, for they saw the person who appeared among them as created and ruled – He has commanded avoiding them. Then He said, 'So enter your houses by their Gates', which means they [the Gates] are the friends (*awliyāʾ*) who bring people into a truthful knowledge of God through the knowledge of the true internal meaning (*al-bāṭin al-ḥaqq*), by providing thereby a clear proof, for God the Lord of the worlds He is the visible (*ẓāhir*) person who is among us, and they [i.e. the Gates] call us to obey and embrace Him.[134]

The Gates are thus presented not just as the first to have responded to God's call and the highest degree of the spiritual hierarchy, but as the guardians of God's true, inner knowledge. It is perhaps no coincidence that the author of *Kitāb al-mithāl* placed the passage at the end of his work as a means of further emphasising their importance.

The importance of the Gates is asserted by the author of *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, who compares them to sailors; they steer the ships that lead believers to salvation.[135] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar writes that 'God manifests in the image of the Gate'.[136] A detailed discussion of the Gates is found in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*. The work, as its title says, is about the spiritual path (*ṣirāṭ*) that leads a believer upwards to God. This path consists of several consecutive degrees of perfection, each giving the seeker a higher degree of divine knowledge. The Gates are found at the highest of these degrees. More than being simply spiritual abstractions,

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[132] Ibid., p. 234; Q. 2:189.

[133] The phrase 'external words and deeds' is also expressed by using derivatives of *ẓāhir*, and literally reads ما الأظهر لمن الأقوال لو الأفعال (*mā aẓhara min al-aqwāl wa'l-afāl*).

[134] Ibid., p. 234.

[135] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 263.

[136] This comes from a passage in Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 53.

they are entities charged with giving the believers the knowledge of the divine, as in the two texts discussed above. In one place Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq tells Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī that God made the Gates 'keys to goodness and locks against evil', and because Mufaḍḍal is one of them, he is charged with explaining the divine knowledge to those believers who are on the stages of the Path.[137] Elsewhere the Gates are called the 'Path for all people at all times, periods, eras and ages. The knowledge of that Gate is the Path for all seeking followers'.[138] As in *Kitāb al-akwār*, the Gate in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* is often encountered as part of a triad, whose other two members are the Name (*ism*) and the Veil (*ḥijāb*). While the latter is not associated with a specific person, the Name most commonly stands for the Prophet Muhammad,[139] who is called God's 'Name internally (*bāṭinan*), and His servant and apostle externally (*ẓāhiran*)'.[140] The other Names are historical and mythical characters from the Biblical and the Islamic traditions.[141] The Gate, on the other hand, is represented mainly by Mufaḍḍal but also by Salmān al-Fārisī. Other sources add more names to the list. In *Ḥaqāʾiq*, for example, Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī writes that according to those who believe in God's unicity (*ahl al-tawḥīd*), God's Gates include several personalities, including Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr.[142]

The examples quoted reflect the fact that after the death of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī some Shiʿis were preoccupied with the figure of the Gate, claiming that he represented the will of the Hidden Imam during his

[137] 'Know, Mufaḍḍal, that God made the Gates keys to goodness and made you one of them, granting you a longing for wisdom through exploration in order to reach greatness. The greatest master Muhammad, may peace come from him, has said: "God made some of His creatures keys to goodness and locks against evil"; the goodness is what is inward and spiritual, and the evil is what is outward and material. You are one of them and you must explain what I say and reveal to you, you must reveal and say it to those who are on the Stages of the Path, which one can ascend only to the degree of one's knowledge, actions and effort', *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 71.

[138] Ibid., p. 90. Elsewhere, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* says that 'the Gate is the proof (*ḥujja*) for the people of degrees (*marātib*) and stages (*daraj*) because they are of his substance (*jawhariyya*), or he is their substance' (p. 180).

[139] Ibid., pp. 90, 118.

[140] Ibid., p. 179.

[141] Nūḥ, Jibrīl, Yāʾīl, Ḥām, Dān, ʿAbd Allāh, Salmān, Shīth, Yūsuf, Yūshiʿ, Āṣif, Shamʿūn and Amīr al-Naḥl, i.e. ʿAlī.

[142] *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 58.

absence. Whether indeed Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr wrote either, or any part of, the two texts attributed to him is irrelevant. What is important is that the role of the *abwāb*, and of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr in particular, is time and again asserted here and in other Ghulat writings of the period.

The figure of the *bāb* remained prominent later on in the writings of the Nuṣayrīs as well.[143] Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, a writer of the 4th–5th/10th–11th centuries, for example, devotes two chapters in his *Kitāb al-maʿārif* to the Gates: one to their appointment, and the other to their miracles. In both, the figure of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr occupies a prominent position.[144]

Ghulat Literature in the 3rd/9th Century: a Broader Picture

Detecting the occurrence of direct and indirect traces of *Kitāb al-haft* in the Ghulat literature of the 3rd/9th century serves a double purpose. On the one hand it allows one to locate it in space and time with greater precision, indicating that fragments of it were already in circulation among the Ghulat at that period. More broadly, and more importantly, it shows us the broader picture of the circulation and continuous production of Ghulat literature, the religious themes preoccupying Ghulat authors at that time, and the social anxieties these themes reflect.

In the 3rd/9th century the Ghulat continued to produce literature which largely reflected the themes elaborated in earlier writings. They freely copied the works of other contemporary and earlier Ghulat authors, recycling not just old themes, but old and new texts. This tradition continued among the Nuṣayrīs, whose literature has preserved a considerable amount of earlier material in the form of quotations, and is epitomised in the final version of *Kitāb al-haft* that has reached us through Nuṣayrī hands. The recycling of old themes was not an end in itself, since some of them were used to articulate the

[143] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 58; al-Junbulānī, *Īḍāḥ*, p. 236; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, pp. 55–56; al-Khaṣībī's *Fiqh al-risāla al-rastbāshiyya* (pp. 89–92, 101) has a chapter about the historical manifestations of the Gate throughout history; Muḥammad b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, pp. 234–236.

[144] M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, ed., *Kitāb al-maʿārif by Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī* (Leuven, 2012), pp. 127–150.

new realities facing the Shiʿi community in general, and the Ghulat in particular, at that point in history.

The presence of traces of *Kitāb al-haft* in two texts attributed to Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr allow us to locate it in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century. In the case of *Kitāb al-akwār* these traces are indirect, as it does not quote from the *Kitāb al-haft* per se, but contains a story, 'The Idol Anecdote', which is linked to parts of *Kitāb al-haft* through a number of striking parallels. When and by whom these fragments – which clearly either stem from a common tradition or are the product of a single writer – were included in *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-akwār* may never be clarified. But their discovery in the two texts shows that these polemical anecdotes were in circulation in Ghulat circles at the time when *Kitāb al-akwār* was being put together, that is, during the life of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr and Isḥāq al-Aḥmar. The same is true of the fragment of *Kitāb al-haft* quoted in *Kitāb al-mithāl*. True, this passage does not correspond to any part of the presently known *Kitāb al-haft*, but this only means that there were alternative versions of this treatise that were not included in its current version.

The two direct and indirect traces of *Kitāb al-haft* also indicate the larger literary tradition the book was part of, by showing what groups of earlier and contemporary texts the Ghulat authors of that time read and included in their works. Thus, *Kitāb al-akwār* mentions a certain *Kitāb al-kawr wa'l-dawr* by Muḥammad b. Sinān,[145] which shows that his writings (or ones attributed to him) were in circulation at that period. *Kitāb al-mithāl* has a quotation from another text by Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*. If these two texts attributed to this early 3rd/9th century Ghali author are authentic, then it is likely that the author(s) of *Kitāb al-mithāl* and *Kitāb al-akwār* had access to other texts by the same person as well, possibly *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (or, according to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*), and the various other works listed by al-Najāshī.[146] Likewise, the inclusion of

[145] *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 75; it does not cite any fragments from it, so it is impossible to determine the relationship between the two texts – *Kitāb al-akwār wa'l-adwār al-nūrāniyya* 'The Book of luminous cycles and turns' and *Kitāb al-kawr wa'l-dawr* 'The Book of the cycle and the turn' – which is essentially the same title in the singular.

[146] Or the two texts purportedly written by him, *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa'l-anwār* and *Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-ḥujub*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 6, pp. 19–64 and 65–94, respectively.

two works of the '*aẓilla* Group' (and *Kitāb al-kursī*), suggest that possibly other texts of the group could have been in circulation in the same environment as well.

The fact that the Ghulat continued to actively read earlier works and to write new ones in the 3rd/9th century is now sufficiently clear. But to what degree were these works known to non-Ghulat? Did the 'extremists' keep them secret or did they use them to spread their views? Surely, some Twelver authors had seen, or heard of, some Ghulat writings, such as al-Kashshī, who begins an anecdote with the following words: 'I have seen in one of the books by the Ghulat, and that is *Kitāb al-dawr*'.[147] Hossein Modarressi writes that in the 3rd/9th century the Mufawwiḍa assiduously spread their literature in an attempt to popularise their ideas, using the term 'expansionism' to denote this process.[148] As evidence he cites the numerous traditions which contain Ghulat ideas from Imāmī compilations. Indeed, a large number of *ḥadīth* that discuss themes found in Ghulat literature are found in these compendia; for example, the traditions treating of the ideas of shadows and apparitions recorded by Imāmī authors, which were discussed earlier. Still, the near-absence of any mention in Twelver bio-bibliographical and other works of the several dozen titles of original Ghulat works suggests that the Ghulat were not eager to spread their writings (not *those* writings, at any rate).

Of these surviving titles, which number more than thirty, only *Kitāb al-ṣirāt* by Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Kitāb al-aẓilla* by Muḥammad b. Sinān,[149] and *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn* by Muḥammad b. Mihrān are mentioned by al-Najāshī and al-Masʿūdī. It is true that the sources mention other works by several well-known Ghulat authors, such as Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī and Isḥāq al-Aḥmar. But the titles of lost works that the Twelver sources mention contain no hint of Ghulat themes (such as *Kitāb akhbār al-sayyid* and *Kitāb Majālis Hishām* by Isḥāq al-Aḥmar),[150] and such works that do survive have nothing to do with Ghulat beliefs, such as Mufaḍḍal's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja*.[151] How

147 E.g., al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 481.

148 *Crisis*, pp. 33–34, 42–43.

149 Or *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*, according to al-Mufīd.

150 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 72.

151 These two texts are discussed in Chapter 2.

much effort the Ghulat spent on guarding their writings from the eyes of those outside their circle is uncertain: for it is a fact that some of their titles became known to Imāmī authors, and some of their *ḥadīth* were included in the Imāmī Twelver corpus. But it is also certain that they were reluctant to have their works seen by outsiders. Twelver authors harshly criticised people known to profess teachings described as *ghuluww*, often using their writings to discredit them. Yet they are virtually silent about several dozen texts of undoubted Ghulat content now known, which often bear tellingly Ghulat titles. No Twelver anti-Ghulat author would have passed up the opportunity to attack the 'extremists' by referring to the homosexual symbolism used in some texts, or to the divinisation of the Imam or the Prophet in others.

Thus, none of the Ghulat texts attributed to Mufaḍḍal is mentioned by Twelver authors. Moreover, the two titles that al-Najāshī does mention among Mufaḍḍal's writings have nothing to do with Ghulat teachings. These are *Kitāb al-ihlīlaja* and *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, both rationalist texts devoted to proving the existence of God, a completely legitimate subject for any of the Twelver authors mentioned.[152] And yet al-Najāshī accused Mufaḍḍal of heresy and extremism. The fact that, despite his negative attitude towards al-Juʿfī, he cited not a single text that would, in his view, have been proof of Mufaḍḍal's heresy, shows that he did not have access to any. Al-Kashshī writes about Mufawwiḍa reports written by Mufaḍḍal, but does not suggest that he was in any way eager to spread them among a wider audience. In the case of Muḥammad b. Sinān, only one of the titles, *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, implies Ghulat content (if it is not indeed one of the surviving *aẓilla* texts). The other titles display no hint of Ghulat teachings, and it is possible that those works were concerned with unrelated topics.

Numerous *ḥadīth*, detailing the concept of delegation, the Imams' miraculous powers, the creation of shadows and apparitions and so on, did make it into the Twelver compendia. But this only shows that *ḥadīth* and the fully fledged treatises of the type of *Kitāb al-haft* or *Kitāb al-ḥujub* have undergone different modes of transmission. It demonstrates the fact that although they often articulate similar ideas and appear to be the product of the same milieu, they passed from one

[152] Al-Najashī, *Rijāl*, p. 398; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maʿālim*, p. 124; cf. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, pp. 187, 226; Tihrānī, *Dharīʿa*, vol. 4, pp. 482–483.

person to another by different means, and their authors and readers viewed them differently. Maria Dakake argues that Shiʿi *ḥadīth* were passed on through a process of transmission that was largely written rather than oral.[153] Still, because in most cases it is short and easy to memorise or to write down, the inclusion of *ḥadīth* of Ghulat content in the mainstream Twelver compilations is easy to imagine. Of a smaller size, an individual anecdote could easily pass outside the boundaries of the Ghulat community, either by word of mouth or in written form. Not a long text like *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, which from the outset must have existed as a separate treatise, in the form of a physical book. Because of their size, such texts could not be memorised or jotted down on the spot, hence it was easier to prevent them circulating beyond the Ghulat community.[154]

The fact that almost none of the actual Ghulat books are mentioned in Twelver writings suggests that the Ghulat did not reveal their writings to outsiders and that they circulated these texts exclusively among themselves. The heavily veiled references to members of the Prophet's family is a further indication that they felt uneasy at the thought that outsiders might become acquainted with their teachings. In fact, secrecy is clearly mandated in the Corpus and in traditions of Ghulat origin in Nuṣayrī texts, where the divulging of secrets is strictly forbidden. For example, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* contains the threat of a harsh punishment for those who divulge the secrets of the 'Path' to someone undeserving, who may 'snatch it in an adulterous, deceptive manner, pretending to care for it . . . [and] will shout aloud about the Path to the world, will revile its followers, will lead them astray, will tell lies about them, and will lead them to the tyrants of the time and to perdition'.[155] A phrase recurring in Nuṣayrī sources, which has a Ghulat *isnād* and which therefore most probably originated in Ghulat circles, sums this

[153] Dakake, 'Writing and Resistance', pp. 181–201.

[154] For a discussion of the complexity in which the oral and the written modes of transmission of texts interacted in the early Islamic centuries, see A. Al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: a Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources* (Berlin, 2014), pp. 87–100.

[155] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 86; see also *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 39.

up cogently: 'What is permissible for you among yourselves is forbidden to you [when you are] with others.'[156]

The cosmological themes that preoccupied the Ghulat in this period are readily apparent in their writings, and many of them are attested to among the earlier Ghulat. These include the notion that religious duties are in reality the names of persons, which is found in the teachings of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb in the early 2nd/8th century, and a century and a half later is elaborated on in the works of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar. Another is the adoration of members of the Prophet's family, which took many forms and was articulated with different shades of meaning. A close examination of the original Ghulat writings has showed that these beliefs were rather haphazardly distributed throughout various periods and in various Ghulat texts, and at times two different types of adoration for the Imams and the Prophet could coexist in the same text. This suggests that the classification of the Shiʿi 'extremists' into those who deified Muhammad and the Imams and those who considered them 'delegated' must be abandoned.

In the 3rd/9th century, some of the earlier Ghulat beliefs were recast to articulate new anxieties that emerged during the Minor Occultation, when in the absence of a manifest Imam various individuals claimed to be in contact with the Mahdī. The teaching about the sevenfold spiritual hierarchy, with the *abwāb*, 'Gates', as their highest point, is present in earlier Ghulat texts. It was now, however, that the idea of the 'Gates' began to be discussed as a separate notion and extra emphasis laid on their importance as the sole guides of humanity.

[156] حلال لكم معكم حرام عليكم مع غيركم, see Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 139; *Majmaʿ al-akhbār*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā (Lebanon, 2008), vol. 8, pp. 51, 137; *al-Jawhara al-ṭālaqāniyya*, ibid., p. 399.

The Texts attested to in **Kitāb al-mithāl** *and the Type of Literature circulating at the Period in the Ghulat Milieu*

Texts quoted in *Kitāb al-mithāl*		**Related texts that could have been in circulation in the same environment**
Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla	*aẓilla* Group	*Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-aẓilla*
Kitāb al-aẓilla		*Kitāb al-anwār wa'l-ḥujub*
Kitāb al-kursī		All the other *Kutub al-aẓilla* (mentioned in al-Najāshī)
Kitāb al-tawḥīd	Muḥammad b. Sinān	*Kitāb al-ḥujub wa'l-anwār* Several books mentioned by al-Najāshī
Kitāb al-tanbīh	Isḥāq al-Aḥmar	*Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* *Bāṭin al-taklīf* *Kitāb al-ṣalāt* *Kitāb akhbār al-Sayyid* *Kitāb majālis Hishām*
Kitāb al-marātib		
Risālat al-tawḥīd		
Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ		

4

Ghulat Literature among the Nuṣayrīs in Syria

Numerous fragments of *Kitāb al-haft* are next encountered in the writings of several Nuṣayrī writers in Syria in the 4th/10th century. This fact illustrates several processes. Firstly, of course, it provides information about the text itself: about the period and area of its circulation and about the history of its compilation. It is also informative about the textual variations between the currently available recension of *Kitāb al-haft* and alternative variants as reflected in those fragments – some of which did not make it into the version currently known.

If viewed as part of the Ghulat literature in the possession of the Nuṣayrī authors of Syria in the 4th/10th century and beyond, these fragments are helpful in understanding larger processes still. Firstly, they show that the Nuṣayrīs, the followers of Muḥammad b. Nusayr, did indeed come to Syria from Iraq, the initial Ghulat centre. This view has been taken for granted, but the near-absence of testimonies regarding this process make any additional material confirming the matter welcome.[1] Secondly, they show that when migrating to Syria, the Nuṣayrīs brought with them a large part of the Ghulat written heritage, thus preserving it and using it, further elaborating on the themes found in it.

Furthermore, tracing the path taken by *Kitāb al-haft* and observing its wider textual environment helps to remedy the rather thin documentation of the history of the Nuṣayrīs in Syria. It illustrates

[1] Cf. C. Cahen, 'Note sur les origins de la communauté Syrienne des Nuṣayris', *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 38 (1970), pp. 243–249, who admits that his study is largely based on conjecture due to the lack of sources. In 1982, before most of the Ghulat sources were available, Heinz Halm rightly argued that the Nuṣayrīs can be traced back to the Iraqi Ghulat for the similarity of teachings and terminology between the two groups, *Gnosis*, p. 284.

some of the aspects of the formation of the community, the relations between the Nuṣayrīs and other Muslim and non-Muslim groups, and is suggestive of the practices of textual transmission among Nuṣayrī authors. This chapter will study these questions by following the fragments of *Kitāb al-haft* in the writings of several Nuṣayrī authors. In the case of each, it will examine the fragments themselves and the larger context of other Ghulat writings as cited in these Nuṣayrī works, and will investigate the broader environment where these authors were active. The chapter will conclude with observations about the history of the text of *Kitāb al-haft* on the one hand, and of Ghulat literature on the other.

The Ghulat between Iraq and Syria

Early in the 4th/10th century, a group made up of the followers of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr was transplanted by its leader, Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 358/969), to Syria. The Nuṣayrī community of Iraq continued to exist but remained marginal, and Syria henceforth became the main centre of the group, where it has survived for over a millennium. Primary sources say nothing about the causes for this move, but a comparison between the situations in Iraq and Syria suggests what they might have been. The previous chapter already discussed the strained relations between the Ghulat and the 'moderates'. One of the possible reasons for such tensions was the claim to authority by some of the Ghulat during the Minor Occultation. One such claimant was the eponymous founder of the Nuṣayrī community Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, whose aspirations, of course, did not materialise. These claims were occasioned by the crisis of leadership that the Imāmī community was grappling with in the absence of a manifest Imam. Apart from seeking legitimate leadership, however, the community was also trying to define itself as a part of the broader ʿAbbasid society.[2] The cosmology of the Ghulat, with its esoteric orientation, its divinisation of the Imams and the Prophet, as

[2] S. Arjomand, 'The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shiʿism', *The Journal of Religion*, 76 (1996), pp. 548–571; Amir-Moezzi, 'Knowledge is Power', pp. 225–226; Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya', p. 533; Dakake, *Charismatic*, pp. 177–189.

well as the antinomian element found in it, was at odds with the attempt to fit into the broader society in which they were situated and to build peaceful relations with the state. Apart from any problems they may have encourtered, some of the elements of their doctrine were simply too different from what was being defined as Islamic by many other Muslims, especially in the centres of learning in Iraq. Perhaps, therefore, one should not be surprised that the Imāmī community came to shun the Ghulat.[3]

Syria, meanwhile, was far both from the centre of ʿAbbasid power and the centres of Imāmī Shiʿism in Iran and Iraq. The Ḥamdānid principality of Aleppo proved a convenient place for the Nuṣayrīs to settle since its ruler Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī (d. 350/967), although himself a Twelver, tolerated other forms of Shiʿism as well.[4] This circumstance allowed the Nuṣayrīs to flourish and to continue producing literature, while their leader al-Khaṣībī became an esteemed member of Sayf al-Dawla's circle of poets and scholars. To what degree he was open about his religious affiliation is unclear, and it is possible that he might have posed as a Twelver.[5]

Al-Khaṣībī was a prolific author and was thoroughly familiar with Ghulat literature. In his *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, known outside Nuṣayrī circles, any Ghulat themes are toned down.[6] Two of his works that have recently become available, *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya* and *Fiqh al-risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, however, are very explicit in their Nuṣayrī orientation, and discuss such themes as God's manifestations, the relations between the *maʿnā*, His *ism* and His *bāb*, the allegorical interpretation of religious obligations, the transmigration of souls and other Ghulat themes.[7] At the same time, al-Khaṣībī quotes fragments

[3] It is no coincidence, perhaps, that al-Khaṣībī was imprisoned as a result of his missionary activities in Baghdad, while the leader of the Iraqi branch of the Nuṣayrīs was killed, see B. Paoli, 'La diffusion de la doctrine nusayrie au IV^{e}/X^{e} siècle d'après le *Kitāb Hayr al-ṣanīʿa* du cheikh Ḥusayn Mayhūb Ḥarfūš', *Arabica*, 58 (2011), pp. 25–26.

[4] M. Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des H'amdanides de Jazîra et de Syrie* (Paris, 1953), p. 634.

[5] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 32.

[6] Cf. ibid., pp. 250–251.

[7] Both published in the second volume of the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, pp. 15–82 and 82–156.

from several other Ghulat texts, including Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's *Kitāb al-mithāl* and *Kitāb al-usūs*. He also quotes a short fragment from a certain *Kitāb al-ẓuhūrāt* on Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar's authority, which does not occur anywhere else.[8]

After the fall of the Ḥamdānids in 396/1005, the region passed into Fāṭimid control. The pro-Shiʿi attitude of the Ḥamdānids was followed by the tolerant attitude of the Fāṭimids towards various religious groups, which benefited not just the Nuṣayrīs but Christians as well.[9] In fact, it is from among Christians and Jews that the Nuṣayrīs recruited a large number of followers in this region,[10] and engagement with them is reflected in the Nuṣayrī writings where fragments of *Kitāb al-haft* are next found.

One of the authors who quotes passages from *Kitāb al-haft*, along with a multitude of fragments of other Ghulat texts, is Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī (d. after 399/1009).[11] A look at the Ghulat titles appearing chiefly in his *Ḥāwī* reveal a rich Ghulat literature from which he drew ideas and quotations. It appears, however, that some of the works that he cited reached him as citations in earlier Ghulat writings. For example, fragments from *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, Muḥammad b. Sinān's

[8] *Al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, p. 39; the passage is very clearly from a Ghulat text as it discusses the manifestation of the *maʿnā*; it is also quoted in two other texts, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥarrānī, *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 4, p. 292; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Risāla al-jawhariyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3, p. 37. *Al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya* also quotes a fragment from another text that is not found in other writings, *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-murtadd* (p. 59), but it displays no Ghulat features and, since it is very brief, an understanding of its possible origin cannot be arrived at on the basis of internal evidence. Another work, which Friedman attributes to al-Khaṣībī, is a collection of poems. A fragment of al-Khaṣībī's lost work is preserved in al-Jillī's *al-Risāla al-nuʿmāniyya*, p. 304, and is entitled *al-Farq bayn al-rasūl wa'l-mursal*.

[9] A. Treiger, 'The Arabic Tradition', in Augustine Casiday, ed., *The Orthodox Christian World* (Abingdon, 2012), p. 93; K. Salibi, *Syria under Islam: Empire on Trial, 634–1097* (Delmar, NY, 1977), p. 86; S. Humphreys, 'Syria', in Chase Robinson, ed., *The New Cambridge History of Islam*: vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World: Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 540; S. Zakkar, *The Emirate of Aleppo 1004–1094* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 238–240.

[10] Paoli, 'La diffusion', pp. 27–29; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 37.

[11] According to Paoli, he died in 399/1009, but it is unclear from where he took this information, see 'La diffusion', p. 26. In fact, there is testimony that al-Jillī was seen alive in the same year in Aleppo, cf. *Majmaʿ al-akhbār*, p. 158.

Kitāb al-tawḥīd, *Kitāb al-azilla* and Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-tanbīh* are copied in al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī* as part of a citation from the first three pages of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's *Kitāb al-mithāl*.[12] The same applies to two long passages from *Kitāb al-kursī* and from Muḥammad b. Sinān's *Kitāb al-marātib wa'l-daraj*, one immediately following the other,[13] which occur in the same order in *Kitāb al-mithāl*.[14] Whether these two combined passages are also copied directly from *Kitāb al-mithāl* is not certain, but it indicates that some of the Ghulat writings circulated among the Nuṣayrī authors in fragments. (More evidence of this will be presented during the discussion of the works of the Ḥarrānī family, some of whom copied the Ghulat fragments exactly as they appear in al-Jillī's works.) Al-Jillī also copied two large passages from works of the '*azilla* Group', from *Kitāb al-azilla* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa'l-azilla*[15] (the former having been earlier 'plagiarised' in *Kitāb al-kursī*).[16] Again, following a similar pattern, the two fragments are copied in the exact same way by Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī.

Finally, al-Jillī quotes passages from seven other Ghulat texts (including *Kitāb al-haft*), most of which are found in later Nuṣayrī writings but were not quoted in earlier Ghulat works. The previously unquoted fragments found in al-Jillī's work are from Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, which speaks about the truth of God's unicity in Ghulat terms.[17] Another work quoted is *Kitāb ādāb al-dīn*, which has survived independently as *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*. Two other works quoted are *Kitāb maʿrifat al-bārī* and *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn*, both of which discuss Ghulat ideas such as the evil of the 'moderates', God's veils (*ḥujub*) and names (*asmāʾ*), and using Ghulat vocabulary, such as

[12] Al-Jillī begins the passage without acknowledging Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, simply stating 'And he said in *Kitāb al-mithāl wa'l-ṣūra*', see *Ḥāwī*, pp. 200–203; the corresponding pages in *Kitāb al-mithāl* are pp. 207–211. Elsewhere, however, al-Jillī cites another two fragments from the same work, and in one he says that it is Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's work, see *Ḥāwī*, p. 214 (the other fragment is on p. 165).

[13] *Kitāb al-kursī* is in *Ḥāwī*, pp. 181–184, and *Kitāb al-marātib* follows on pp. 184–190.

[14] *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 227–234.

[15] See my 'An Early Shīʿi Cosmology', pp. 1–80; the fragments are copied, accordingly, in *Ḥawī*, pp. 207–209 and 209–212.

[16] See Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 131–135.

[17] Al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 200.

referring to God by the term *al-maʿnā* 'the meaning'.[18] As noted earlier, *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn* is mentioned by al-Najāshī as a work by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān.

Contacts with Christians are amply reflected in al-Jillī's work, where he engages with Christian ideas and uses Christian images. Notably, in his *Christian Epistle* (*al-Risāla al-masīḥiyya*)[19] he describes the nature of Christ using both Islamic and Christian imagery. He writes that outwardly Jesus is a prophet and an apostle (*ẓāhiruhu nabī wa-rasūl*), while inwardly he is God, Lord of the universes (*bāṭinuhu Allāh rabb al-ʿālamīn*), and explains the nature of the crucifix as symbolising the phrase *lā ilāha illā Allāh* ('there is no god but God').[20] The treatise ends with a passage stating that it is the 'master *mīm*' (*al-sayyid al-mīm*), that is, the Prophet Muhammad, who showed Christ to the people.[21] Al-Jillī further engages with Christian ideas in his *Risāla al-nuʿmāniyya*,[22] where he states that Christ's apostles (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*) are in reality the *nuqabāʾ* (sg. *naqīb*)[23] – who constitute one of the degrees in the Ghulat spiritual hierarchy.

Another cluster of fragments of *Kitāb al-haft* are found in the writings of al-Jillī's contemporary, the well-known Nuṣayrī author Ḥasan b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī (second half of the 4th/10th century),[24] who was a member of a family of Nuṣayrī authors from Ḥarrān. During the ʿAbbasid period Ḥarrān was an important centre of

[18] Together with *Ḥāwī*, two epistles by al-Jillī, titled *Risālat al-fatq* and *Risālat al-andiya*, have been published in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 309–319 and pp. 321–333; the fragments from the remaining six works are the following (the ones found in *Kitāb al-haft* will be discussed separately below): in *Ḥāwī*: Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 197, 200, *Kitāb ādāb al-dīn*, p. 171, *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn*, pp. 194, 198, *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 159, 160, 172, 195, 214, *Kitāb maʿrifat al-bārī*, p. 170; in *Risālat al-fatq*: *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 318; in *Risālat al-andiya*: *Kitāb al-risāla*, pp. 326–330 (the last page of the latter treatise is not certain as the ending is not clearly indicated and it is not apparent where the quotation ends).

[19] In *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 289–302.

[20] *Al-Risāla al-masīḥiyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 289, 291.

[21] Ibid., p. 302.

[22] In *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 2, pp. 303–308.

[23] *Al-Risāla al-nuʿmāniyya*, p. 306.

[24] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 45.

learning and the city of the famous Ṣābians of Ḥarrān.[25] The works of the Ḥarrānīs demonstrate vast learning and a familiarity with the Greek heritage. But both the inventory of the titles they quote and a testimony by Ḥasan demonstrate that these Ḥarrānī writers were important preservers of the Ghulat and Nuṣayrī heritage and possessed a sizable library of their writings.

Ḥasan b. Shuʿba is known in the Twelver tradition as the alleged author of *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl*, which is a Twelver text.[26] His Nuṣayrī writings, however, have remained largely unknown to outsiders. His *Ḥaqāʾiq*[27] reveals his adherence to Nuṣayrī beliefs and his good command of Ghulat literature, and in its opening paragraph Ḥasan states that in his library he had around 150 titles[28] of 'esoteric monotheism' (*al-tawḥīd al-bāṭin*), and around 250 books of 'pentadism' (*takhmīs*), 'divine delegation' (*tafwīḍ*), 'moderation' (*taqṣīr*), and 'exoteric knowledge' (*ʿilm al-ẓāhir*).[29] By 'esoteric monotheism' he probably meant to refer to Nuṣayrī works, as the Nuṣayrīs called themselves *muwaḥḥidūn* ('monotheists'),[30] and *takhmīs* and *tafwīḍ*, of course, referred to the teachings of the Mukhammisa and the Mufawwiḍa.

The various types of books that al-Ḥarrānī enumerates are rather telling; as one would expect, the largest group consists of Nuṣayrī works; then there are books by the Mukhammisa and Mufawwiḍa Ghulat, which are abundantly quoted in the *Ḥaqāʾiq*. Given the polemics between the Ghulat and some of the Imāmīs, and the polemical appellations each group used against the other, the books on

[25] See G. Fehérvári, 'Ḥarrān', *EI*2; K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 64–114; T. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 44–217.

[26] Al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-shīʿa* (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 5, pp. 185–186.

[27] For a study of the authorship of this work, see H. Bagheri, 'Pazhūhishī dar intisāb-i chand athar-i jadīd al-intishār bi Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Shuʿba-yi Ḥarrānī, muḥaddith-i shinākhta shuda-yi shīʿī', *ʿUlūm-i ḥadīth*, 4 (1393 Sh./2014), pp. 60–64.

[28] The term *kitāb* used by al-Ḥarrānī is probably a reference to individual titles of books rather than the number of volumes, cf. K. Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: a Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 128.

[29] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 12.

[30] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 24.

taqṣīr probably refer to Imāmī ones, that is, those containing the teachings of the *muqaṣṣira* (*taqṣīr* being a verbal noun derived from the same Arabic root). What the 'books of exoteric knowledge' in al-Ḥarrānī's collection were is not readily apparent. One may speculate, however, that he was referring to translations of Greek philosophical texts; the presence of these in Ḥasan's library probably accounts for the references to Aristotle and other Greek sages in works by some of his relatives.[31]

In writing about his collection, Ḥasan b. Shuʿba used the expression 'reached me' (*intahā ilayya*), which does not clarify whether he personally owned the books, or whether he had access to them on some kind of a communal basis. In any case, given that most of them were Nuṣayrī and Ghulat works, the collection was unlikely to have been used by anyone outside the Nuṣayrī community, and a comparison with some contemporary and later medieval figures for book collections suggests that it was a considerable size for its time. Against the nearly 400 titles in al-Ḥarrānī's collection, the 5th/11th-century Būyid *wazīr* Sābūr b. Ardashīr's private library had 10,000 volumes,[32] while in the 7th/13th-century the mosque library of Qayrawān had just 125 works, and in the same period there were 1500 titles in the collection of Ibn Ṭāwūs in Baghdad, 761 in the collection of a Damascene scholar by the name of al-Kindī, and 2100 titles in the library of the Ashrafiyya Mausoleum in Damascus; however, in the 10th/16th century a Cairene endowment had only 182 titles, and the endowment of a wealthy scholar just 263 works.[33]

The list of Ghulat works cited in al-Ḥarrānī's *Ḥaqāʾiq* confirms his testimony as it is a treasure-trove of the fragments of earlier Ghulat texts. In all, there are fragments from nineteen different texts of varying length. It appears that Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's *Kitāb al-mithāl* was quite popular in Nuṣayrī circles, for like al-Jillī, al-Ḥarrānī quotes three lengthy passages from it, and in fact, some of the Ghulat

[31] See Muḥammad b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, p. 292; ʿAlī b. Ḥamza al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, pp. 243, 268–269.

[32] R. Elayyan, 'The History of the Arabic Islamic Libraries: 7th to 14th Centuries', *International Library Review*, 22 (1990), p. 121.

[33] Hirschler, *The Written Word*, pp. 129, 146.

fragments come as secondary quotations, as part of these passages.[34] Some of the titles that are quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's book also occur independently, however, indicating that Ḥasan b. Shuʿba had access to the works themselves.[35] In some cases, al-Ḥarrānī cites fragments from more than one work that occur identically, and in the same order, in al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī*. Most notably, there are two lengthy passages from *Kitāb al-aẓilla* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*.[36] While there is no evidence that one author copied from another, this might indicate that they both used a common inventory not just of texts, but of fragments circulating independently. Alongside these texts and a number of passages from *Kitāb al-haft*, al-Ḥarrānī's text contains a number of fragments from previously uncited Ghulat writings, which makes it the richest repository of information on 'extremist' Shiʿi literature.[37]

Life in the Nuṣayrī community and its relationships with other groups come into focus in the work of another well-known Nuṣayrī author from Northern Syria, Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī. He was a follower of al-Jillī[38] and a prolific author.[39] In his numerous works al-Ṭabarānī departs somewhat from the prose style of al-Jillī and Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, using fewer quotations. In fact, *Kitāb al-haft* is one of only

[34] Two of these passages are from the opening of *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 207–211 (in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 42–46), and pp. 211–222 (*Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 96–107), and the third is from the end, pp. 229–234 (*Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 77–87). The passages that occur in *Ḥaqāʾiq* through the mediation of *Kitāb al-mithāl* are the following: Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (p. 45), *Risālat al-tawḥīd* (pp. 45, 77–80), *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (p. 45), Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Kitāb al-tanbīh* (p. 45), *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* (p. 101), *Kitāb al-marātib* (pp. 82–87, 101), *Kitāb al-kursī* (pp. 80–82).

[35] Such as *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (pp. 41, 64, 71–74, 173), *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* (p. 174), *Kitāb al-marātib waʾl-daraj* (p. 118).

[36] These are quoted in *Ḥāwī*, pp. 207–209, 209–212, respectively, and similarly in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 70–74, 74–77.

[37] These are Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Bāṭin al-taklīf* (pp. 36–37, 49, 172, 174), *Kitāb al-anwār* (p. 174), *Kitāb al-dastūr* (pp. 46–47, 55), *Kitāb al-murshid* (p. 145) and *Kitāb Amīr al-muʾminīn* (p. 123).

[38] See the beginning of his *Ḥāwī*, p. 44, where he speaks of receiving knowledge from his 'lord the reliable shaykh Abuʾl-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī'; cf. also Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 41.

[39] M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, 'Dogma and Ritual in "Kitāb al-Maʿārif" by the Nuṣayrī Theologian Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034–35)', *Arabica*, 52 (2005), pp. 43–44; idem, 'Introduction', in *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, p. 2; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 41–42.

four Ghulat texts mentioned in his collection of legal opinions entitled *al-Ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwī* which he does not directly quote but merely uses as an example.[40] Still, al-Ṭabarānī seems to have been well versed in Ghulat literature as he mentions several other Ghulat writings in his works.[41] One of them is the aforementioned *Kitāb al-akwār*, which depicts Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr's conflict with another Ghulat author, Isḥāq al-Aḥmar. Interestingly, al-Ṭabarānī also displays a dislike of Isḥāq,[42] which must have had contemporary relevance for him and was not just distant memory: in several places he attacks Isḥāq's followers, the Isḥāqiyya,[43] which is an indication that there was a conflict between the Isḥāqīs and the Nuṣayrīs at that period.[44]

Contacts between the Nuṣayrīs and Christians are reflected in al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Ḥāwī* and *al-Risāla al-jawhariyya*, where he speaks rather highly of them.[45] Similar sentiments are found in a 5th/11th century anonymous Nuṣayrī work, which discusses why the Christians are closer to being believers than the Jews.[46]

Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla and Ghulat Literature in Syria

Kitāb al-haft is one of the Ghulat texts most frequently quoted in the writings of Nuṣayrī authors. These quotations do not cover the entire text as we have it today, but nonetheless they furnish several important facts about the work. Firstly, *Kitāb al-haft* has gone through considerable variations, since not all of the parts initially known under this title have made it into the current recension. For example, al-Jillī's *Ḥāwī al-asrār* cites a passage that is not found in its current

[40] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwī*, p. 98.

[41] *Kitāb al-ẓuhūrāt* in his *Kitāb al-jawhariyya al-kalbiyya*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿalawī*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Kāfī li'l-ḍidd al-munāfī* attributed to Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, quoted in his *Ḥāwī*, pp. 53, 105, 108–115; *Kitāb al-mawārid*, also attributed to Ibn Nuṣayr, quoted in *al-Ḥāwī*, pp. 49, 53; *Kitāb sabʿīn* in *al-Ḥāwī*, p. 65.

[42] *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*, p. 130; *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, pp. 148–150.

[43] Al-Ṭabarānī considered the Isḥāqiyya unbelievers and criticised their rituals, see his *Ḥāwī*, pp. 59, 63, 74; idem, *Kitāb al-dalāʾil fī al-masāʾil*, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, vol. 3, p. 153.

[44] Further on this, see Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, pp. 16–19; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 'Dogma and Ritual', p. 44.

[45] *Al-Risāla al-jawhariyya*, p. 36; *al-Ḥāwī*, pp. 91–92.

[46] *Majmaʿ al-akhbār*, p. 57.

form, but recalls the first layer of the work, discussing the creation of the seven Adams.[47] Secondly, even those parts that have made it into the present version sometimes display considerable differences from the current version of *Kitāb al-haft*. For example, Chapters 3–6 of the current *Kitāb al-haft*[48] are combined in a short passage in *Ḥāwī*.[49] Or, al-Ḥarrānī quotes a passage that is narrated as usual by Mufaḍḍal, but instead of Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq his interlocutor is Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the latter's grandson and the eight imam of the Twelvers.[50] Thirdly, we learn that by the end of the 4th/10th century, *Kitāb al-haft* already incorporated parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, *Kitāb al-kursī* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* as evidenced in the citations from it in al-Jillī's and Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī's works.[51]

Other than being an indirect source for the history of the Ghulat and their writings, *Kitāb al-haft* appears to be of little use as a historical document. It does however contain a direct reference to the Banū Mirdās dynasty, who held power in Syria in the 5th/11th century and ruled Aleppo between 415 and 473/1024 and 1080.[52] Although the founder of the dynasty, Ṣāliḥ b. Mirdās (d. 420/1029), was a Shiʿi, they are presented here as the enemies of the Prophet's family, which indicates that the Nuṣayrīs did not fare well under the Mirdāsids, who adopted Sunnī Islam when they came under the domination of its great champions, the Saljūqs, in 462/1070.[53] This reference also shows that

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[47] *KH*, p. 177.

[48] Ibid., pp. 23–29.

[49] Al-Jillī, *Ḥawī*, p. 176. It is also possible that there was a (larger?) version of *KH* entitled *Kitāb al-haft wa'l-aẓilla wa'l-ashbāḥ al-kabīr*, cf. Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 63–64; Catafago, p. 523, no. 1; of course, it is also possible that this is just an alternative title for the same work.

[50] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 166–167; the three passages correspond to ch. 48, p. 133, ch. 53, p. 145, ch. 54, p. 147 and ch. 56, p. 151.

[51] The first two are found in *Ḥāwī*, pp. 160, 214, and the third in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 17 (corresponding to *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 4).

[52] Ch. 55, p. 184.

[53] R. Crawford, 'Reconstruction of a Struggle within the Mirdāsid Dynasty of Ḥalab', *JAOS*, 73.2 (1953), pp. 89–95; T. Bianquis and S. Shamma, 'Mirdās, Banū or Mirdāsids', *EI*2; T. Bianquis, *Damas et Syrie sous la domination Fatimide* (Damascus, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 518–519, 533.

the part of *Kitāb al-haft* that mentions them, Chapter 65[54] (and possibly other nearby chapters that resemble it in style), was written or added to the book after this date.

There is one detail, found only in the 1981 edition of *Kitāb al-haft*, that illustrates the later trajectory of this text in Syria and its appropriation, along with other Ghulat writings, by the Nizārī Ismailis. The Nizārīs separated from the Fāṭimids under the initial leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124). They founded a state in Iran with a subsidiary in Syria, and had extended confrontations with their neighbouring Nuṣayrīs in Syria, seizing some Nuṣayrī fortresses in the 6th/12th century. It is perhaps as a result of these contacts that the introduction to this edition was written by an Ismaili, as it mentions five names that represent specific ranks in Ismaili hierarchy: *asās*, *dāʿī*, *ḥujja*, *imām* and *waṣī*. These are mentioned together with five spiritual beings that in early Ismaili thought stand between the spiritual world and human beings: *jadd*, *fatḥ*, *khayāl*, *ʿaql* and *nafs*. Furthermore, in his preface to this edition,[55] the editor states that it is based on a manuscript originating in the Qadmus region of Syria that was copied by a resident of Masyaf. These two place-names are significant because it was these two castles with their surrounding villages that the Nizārī Ismailis conquered in the 6th/12th century, so coming into contact with the Nuṣayrīs and appropriating some of their literature.[56] This is why Ghulat texts have survived in the collections of the Syrian Ismailis.[57] This also explains why certain Nuṣayrī teachings were

[54] *KH*, pp. 171–188.

[55] Reprinted in 2007, p. 5.

[56] Mirza, *Syrian Ismailism*, p. 14; Daftary, 'The Syrian Ismailis and the Crusaders: "History and Myth"', in his *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London, 2005), pp. 152–153.

[57] As mentioned, the manuscript of the 1981 edition of *Kitāb al-haft* originated in Syria; furthermore, in his introduction to the first edition of the work (reprinted in subsequent editions, p. 8) Muṣṭafā Ghālib, who was a Syrian Nizārī Ismaili, stated that he had in his personal collection several copies of the treatise; he also writes of his correspondence with Rudolph Strothmann who, he says, had acquired a copy of *Kitāb al-haft* in the Syrian city of Homs (ibid.). The only manuscript extant containing *Kitāb al-usūs* and *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* (MS Arabe 1449, fols 1a-79b and 86a-182a) was brought to Paris also from Syria, copied in Tripoli in 1791–1792. Furthermore, in his list of what he presented as forty Nuṣayrī manuscripts that he had examined while in Syria, as well as *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-usūs*, Joseph Catafago includes four other titles from the

espoused by some Ismailis. Whether for political purposes or out of personal conviction, the ruler of Qadmus and Masyaf, the Nizārī *dāʿī* Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān (d. 589/1193) reportedly displayed an interest in Nuṣayrī ideas about metempsychosis. A century later, the belief was still current among local Ismailis. [58]

By tracking *Kitāb al-haft's* journey through other works and looking at the circumstances of its composition, circulation and transmission, the preceding chapters have surveyed the history of the entire Ghulat literature. They have traced its emergence in the 2nd/8th century, its further development in the 3rd/9th century, its transfer from Iraq to Syria and preservation by the Nuṣayrīs, who were able to build on it and create a body of writings of their own. It is thanks to the Nuṣayrīs of Syria (and partly to those Ismailis living in Syria) that this hidden heritage has survived. At the same time, as a result of anti-Ghulat sentiments among the newly emerging Twelver orthodoxy, traces of almost the entire Ghulat Corpus are conspicuously absent from Twelver literature.

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ones that have reached us: *Kitāb al-marātib* (no. 2), *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* 'by Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Zāhirī' (no. 7), *Kitāb al-akwār wa'l-adwār al-nūrāniyya* (no. 10) (the last one doubtless refers to *Kitāb al-akwār al-nūrāniyya wa'l-adwār al-rūḥāniyya*). Of course, these are just the titles that we already know; among the remaining ones he lists many which could potentially be of Ghulat origin as well, see Catafago's note in *Journal Asiatique*, 7 (1876), pp. 523–525.

[58] Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 371–372; R. Dussaud, 'Influence de la religion noṣairî sur la doctrine de Râchid ad-Dîn Sinân', *Journal Asiatique* (1900), pp. 61–69; al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (Cairo, 1985), pp. 77–78.

5

Constructing a Universe

This chapter surveys the main cosmological and theological themes expressed in the Ghulat Corpus.[1] Since it consists of texts written by different authors over a period of nearly two centuries, a few words in justification of such a synthesis are in order. The Ghulat ideas about the universe, God and human beings are dispersed throughout their Corpus and are reflected, sometimes rather accurately, in several heresiographical accounts. Despite the relatively large number of these texts, they nonetheless contain a common inventory of themes expressed in a uniform vocabulary and recycled from one text to another. Moreover, at times more than one text quotes the same Qurʾanic verse in reinforcement of the same idea.[2] This indicates that the worldview of the Shiʿi 'extremists' of early Islamic Iraq was largely uniform. And although not all the Ghulat ideas are expressed in all of the texts and fragments currently available, some of the treatises contain a sampling of most of the main themes, further reinforcing the notion of a common worldview among their authors (and readers).

One such text, for example, is *Kitāb al-haft*, which reflects nearly all the currently known Ghulat teachings. That its final text is a compilation and a work of many authors only reinforces the notion of a common religious-literary milieu, because for one author to 'plagiarise' another's work, he must have endorsed its content. Less all-encompassing but more coherent are *Kitāb al-anwār* and *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, which present a picture of the universe by incorporating many of the Ghulat themes found in other texts. What follows, then, is a survey

[1] Although much of the material addressed in this chapter is discussed elsewhere in this book, it still bears repeating here as the goal of the chapter is to present a comprehensive survey of the cosmological system of the Ghulat as a whole.

[2] For examples, see p. 14.

of the main themes articulated in the Ghulat Corpus. Where appropriate, information from heresiographical accounts is also referenced, for at times they very closely replicate the Ghulat's own writings.

The Ghulat universe combined pre-Islamic Gnostic and Manichean elements[3] with a Muslim cast of Imams and prophets. Their world is divided into a realm of light made up of God and spiritual beings, and a dark kingdom of matter and bodily creatures; these two are not walled off from one another but are connected by a chain of being, stretching from an ineffable God presiding over the world of light, down into the world of minerals, and populated by numerous intermediate beings of varying degrees of goodness and evil. Man stands in the middle of this hierarchy and connects both worlds by combining a luminous soul with a material body, and because he is destined to move up and down this ladder as a result of his deeds, good or bad.

Creation, the Fall and the Fate of Human Beings

The story of the creation is preserved in two main versions, one of which survives in a single text, while the other is found in several slightly different accounts. Since all the variants of the latter version broadly replicate the main events recounted in the single text concerning the creation, here only three of them (found in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, *Kitāb al-haft* and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*) will be summarised.[4] The former version is preserved in the fragmentarily surviving *Kitāb al-aẓilla* (and its derivative *Kitāb al-kursī*).

[3] For a study of the possible connections between Ghulat teachings and Gnostic and Manichean ideas, see M. Asatryan and D. Burns, 'Is Ghulāt Religion Islamic Gnosticism? Religious Transmissions in Late Antiquity', in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi et al., ed., *L'ésotérisme shiʿite, ses racines et ses prolongements* (Paris, 2016), pp. 55–86.

[4] Other variants are preserved in Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, pp. 66–73; in a fragment from *Kitāb al-marātib*, quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 230–234 and al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 184–190; for a smaller fragment presenting a similar picture, see *Kitāb al-ibtidāʾ*, quoted in ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī, *Hujja*, pp. 270–271, and *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* attributed to Muḥammad b. Sinān, quoted in al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 175, Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 62–63.

The discussion here begins with the version that survives in several texts, all of which share the following broad elements: (1) God's creation of human beings; (2) His call to obey Him; (3) the acceptance of this by some and the rejection of it by others; and (4) God's veiling Himself from the latter as punishment. Within this scheme, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*'s version is slightly different from the others, and is simpler and populated with fewer actors.

Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ

Having created human beings, God manifested Himself to them in the form of their own appearance and qualities, such that they could see Him (*ẓahara ẓuhūr al-muʿāyana*). God then told the people that He was their Creator and that they were from His essence (*kawn*) and had been created because of His will to do so. After the initial call (*daʿwa*), all the people saw Him but none of them responded. The author stresses, however, that 'their silence in their refusal was without any hidden meaning, without reply and without denial'.[5]

It was after the second call that some people were damned and fell from His grace because this time a group responded and a group rejected it.[6] God then concealed Himself from the lower (*suflī*) world and from the deniers. They began to mock the believers, saying that the person who appeared as God was human just like themselves. Because of their rejection, they remained eternally in the Fire, whereas God became visible to those who responded to His call. Those who responded, however, perceived Him to various degrees (*manāzil*, *rutab*), so He distinguished between them according to their knowledge of Him.[7]

Kitāb al-haft *and* Kitāb al-ashbāḥ

Both these texts exhibit similarities in their creation myths, and share elements of cosmology missing from *Kitāb al-ṣirāt*. The first is the idea

[5] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 137.

[6] In the text, He issues the second call by quoting Q. 7:172 in a slightly modified version.

[7] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 114, 138.

of the *aẓilla* and *ashbāḥ* – benign spiritual entities that were created before anything else, and who praised and worshipped God before He created the world. The second is the teaching about the seven Adams, living with their progeny on seven earths under seven heavens.

According to the first layer of *Kitāb al-haft* (Chapters 1–8), God first created a shadow (*ẓill*) from His will. He then divided it into numerous shadows. God then praised Himself and they praised Him, and this continued for seven thousand years. From this praise He created the seventh heaven and the apparitions (*ashbāḥ*), making them into garments for the shadows.[8] From His own praise of Himself, he created the highest Veil (*al-ḥijāb al-aʿlā*). God then created the seventh Paradise from the seventh heaven, then the first Adam. He then made a covenant (*mīthāq*) with him and his offspring: He affirmed that He was their Lord and creator, and they responded that there was no God save Him.

Then God created seven Adams, and for each He made a Paradise and a heaven, and then created a further seven times everything that He had first created. God sealed a covenant with the inhabitants of all the seven heavens. In each heaven God created a spring, immersed the shadows and the apparitions in it, and they became 'souls in bodies' (*arwāḥ fī abdān*). Then God created seven days, one day for each heaven, and commanded each heaven to praise Him in a certain way.

In order to communicate with each of these worlds, God needed an intermediary. And because of the hierarchical difference between the levels of creation, for each of them God created one veil (*ḥijāb*), designed to help Him to communicate with it.

> If God descends into a heaven, He dons the Veil of that heaven . . . He appears to His creation in this quality [*ṣifa*] in order to instruct them, so that they might understand what He says; for something is only understood by someone who has the same image and the same type.[9]

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[8] In all the three editions the phrase appears thus ثم خلق من تسبيح الأظلة الأشباح وجعلها الأظلة : 'Then from the praise of the shadows He created the apparitions and made them into shadows.' This sentence does not make sense. The solution is found in Halm's translation (based on Strothmann's unpublished edition), where he has inserted the word *libās* 'garments', *Gnosis*, p. 248, note 531.

[9] Ibid., ch. 2, p. 22.

Likewise, in each of these worlds God created bodies from His light for the souls, so that, 'when a soul[10] ascends into a heaven, it is clothed in a body that suits [it]'.[11]

God created the Devil from the transgressions (*maʿāṣī*) and errors of the believers. In the text this is followed by the Qur'anic story which tells how God commanded the angels to worship Adam and they refused,[12] with the difference that here the Devil is not one of the angels. From the rebellion of the Devil God made the disobeying women, and from the rebellion of his progeny He made *masūkhiyya*, that is, the transformation into non-human forms. From these forms God created the bodies of the Devil and his offspring.

There is thus a symmetrical relationship between Adam and his offspring on the one hand and the Devil and his offspring on the other. The former are made of light and their bodies of clay. The latter are made of fire and their bodies are made from the bodies that are part of the cycle of transformation into animals and inanimate objects.

Unlike in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, in *Kitāb al-haft* (and in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*) God is more forgiving towards those who disobey him, and does not damn them to eternal Hellfire. When He had finished instructing the people, they decided to worship God in heaven, without descending to the Earth, 'not knowing that in this there is disobedience and rejection of God the most high'.[13] Thus, God's command here was that humans descend to earth and worship Him from there. From their disobedience He created a Veil and hid behind it, then for each human He made seven bodies into which they began to be continuously reborn, moving from one to the other, feeling guilty and perplexed for having lost their proximity to God. As an act of mercy, however, God sent the Prophet Muhammad to guide them to the right path.

Kitāb al-ashbāḥ follows a similar scheme with similar actors and stages of the creation and fall, but with slight differences in the order and circumstances of their creation. In contrast to *Kitāb al-haft*'s first layer, here it says that God first created the apparitions (*ashbāḥ*),

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[10] All editions have 'body' (*badan*) instead of 'soul', but this does not make sense.

[11] *KH*, ch. 2, p. 22.

[12] Ibid., ch. 5, p. 27, ch. 6, p. 28; *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 8, 15. God also made the veils from their disobedience, see *KH*, ch. 4, p. 26; *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 11, 44.

[13] *KH*, ch. 4, p. 25.

then the shadows (*aẓilla*), then the souls (*arwāḥ*), and all three spiritual entities stand here as prototypes for the believers; the author states that 'the first thing that God created were the believers, whom He [first] made as apparitions before creating them as shadows';[14] then He brought forth the souls, who in the course of the story become substituted with 'believers'.[15] The circumstances of the fall here are also different; after the souls were created, God praised Himself, and the apparitions responded to Him, whereas the shadows inadvertently responded to the apparitions instead of God. Since this transgression was unintentional, in this version God was more forgiving towards them than in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, saying: 'Had you disobeyed Me on purpose, you would have disbelieved in Me.'[16] As a punishment he merely concealed Himself from them. From their error He created bodies for them in which they hid from one another, and from the believers' disobedience He made the Devil and his progeny.[17]

At this point, the idea of the veil (*ḥijāb*) is introduced, presenting a slightly different picture from that of *Kitāb al-haft*. To punish the erring souls, God created numerous veils, in one of which He hid; He said that whoever worshipped Him in that veil was a believer, and whoever worshipped Him in the other ones was an infidel. God commanded the Devil and his progeny to prostrate before Adam but they refused, and from this disobedience He made *masūkhiyya*. When the Devil saw the hideous forms which *masūkhiyya* led to, he became terrified that he and his progeny should enter those forms, and tried to prostrate before God. But because his and his progeny's disobedience had been intentional, God confounded them, preventing them from worshipping Him, so the Devil prostrated 'before every [physical] body he saw, before fire, water, the stars, the sun, the moon . . . before the night, the day, and all that God has created, saying to himself: "Perhaps he has concealed Himself in one of these" '.[18]

As in *Kitāb al-haft*, the notion of seven Adams is tied to the creation story, but here it is part of a more symmetrical sevenfold organisation

[14] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 1.

[15] Ibid., para. 5.

[16] Ibid., para. 4.

[17] Ibid., para. 8; in the same paragraph the author writes that He made the Demon 'the veil which He had made from the believers' error'.

[18] Ibid., para. 11.

of the universe. After His first veil God created seven more and named each of them Adam, and from His first veil He created seven bodies and put a Demon's soul in each of the bodies, who then appeared to be the seven Demons.[19] The seven Adams and their progeny live in the seven heavens: the first Adam in the seventh (and highest), the second in the sixth heaven, and so forth until the seventh Adam and his progeny, who populate the first heaven, which is 'the one near us'.[20] Following the same logic, He put the first Devil and his progeny in the hell of the seventh earth, and so on until the seventh Devil, whom He put in the hell of the first earth, 'the one near us'.[21] The author's preoccupation with a sevenfold organisation of the universe is seen in many other passages as well, where he speaks of seven bodies of light for believers and seven bodies of darkness for unbelievers, the seven levels of Hell and so on.[22]

Kitāb al-aẓilla

Kitāb al-aẓilla presents an altogether different story of how the world came to be. In contrast to the ones previously described, this version of the creation story is less clearly articulated, with more numerous characters whose identities are undisclosed (at least in the surviving parts of the text), and it is less schematic. Nevertheless, several religious motifs found elsewhere in Ghulat and, more broadly, Shiʿi literature, can be discerned here. One is the idea of delegation (*tafwīḍ*) which implies that Muhammad created the world on God's behalf (and was charged with caring for it), which was a belief widely attested among the Ghulat between the 2nd/8th and 4th/10th centuries (while a Nuṣayrī author wrote an entire treatise explaining Muhammad's role in the creation).[23] The second is the story of the creation of Intelligence (*ʿaql*), a motif that probably originated in the 1st/7th century and is attested to in numerous *ḥadīth*, of which the author of *Kitāb al-aẓilla* copied variants and fitted them into his text. The third is the idea of

[19] Ibid., para. 20.

[20] Ibid., para. 23.

[21] Ibid., para. 24.

[22] Ibid., paras 39, 53, *et passim*.

[23] *Risālat al-fatq*, pp. 309–319, by the 4th/10th-century Nuṣayrī author Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī.

shadows (*aẓilla*) found abundantly across the Ghulat corpus, in Nuṣayrī texts and in Shiʿi *ḥadīth*.[24]

Because the characters appearing in the creation story are too numerous, most of them will be omitted and only the main stages of the creation will be presented.[25] The first being that God created, according to this version, was the names of letters, invisible, in a person who cannot be perceived by the senses, with no sides and no boundaries. This person is a word of four letters who, it becomes apparent from internal clues, is the Prophet Muhammad.[26] Elsewhere in the text, God first created Muhammad and delegated (*fawwaḍa*) to him the creation of the world.[27]

From this word God manifested three names, each of which had four pillars, twelve in all. For each of these twelve pillars God made thirty names, 360 in all. God made His throne on water and made four spirits as pillars for it. Thereafter, God spread His light and created Intelligence (*ʿaql*). He gave the command, 'Turn towards me!' and Intelligence turned towards Him, then 'Turn away!' He commanded, and it turned away. God then said to it, 'By you I reward and by you I punish.' This is followed by the creation of the shadows, whom God made in seven ranks. The first rank, which is the closest to God, is that of the messengers (*rusul*, sg. *rasūl*), followed by that of the prophets (*anbiyāʾ*, sg. *nabī*), the believers (*muʾminūn*), the angels (*malāʾika*, sg. *malak*), the unbelievers (*kuffār*), the Pharaohs (*farāʿina*, sg. *firʿawn*),

[24] For a detailed discussion of the three motifs occurring in *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, and their connections to a broader Islamic context, see my 'Shiite Underground Literature'.

[25] For a close paraphrase of all of the surviving parts of *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, see the Appendix to my 'Shiite Underground Literature'; for a discussion of the ideas appearing there, see the article itself.

[26] Firstly, elsewhere in the treatise Muhammad is said to be God's first creation. Secondly, his name as spelt in Arabic consists of four letters. The third indicator is the 'incorrect' grammar of the passage, which reveals that in the author's mind this 'first created thing' was masculine singular, despite the fact that the grammatical object of the first sentence is plural (names of letters, *asmāʾ al-ḥurūf*): after stating that God first created the 'names of letters', the author gives all the adjectives and pronouns referring to them in the masculine singular, instead of the feminine singular (as one would expect with an inanimate plural); for a discussion of the passage see Asatryan, 'Shiite Underground Literature', p. 140.

[27] *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, paras 13–14.

and the seventh rank is that of the devils (*abālisa*, sg. *iblīs*) and the tyrants (*ṭawāghīt*, sg. *ṭāghūt*). Finally, God made Adam from the earth that Jibrīl had fetched from the heavens, and then from him He made Eve. The story concludes with the angels worshipping him and the Devil refusing to do so.

The Chain of Being

The notion of a 'Chain of Being' is not formulated as a separate concept, but the descriptions of the divine realm of light with human beings at its nether end – themselves the highest point of the dark world of matter – present an ordered continuum of evil and good, matter and spirit, darkness and light. The teaching was probably a key part of the way in which the Ghulat conceived of the world, and it is attested in heresiographies[28] as well as original works, two of which, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *Kitāb al-marātib wa'l-daraj,* have it in their very titles, which in English translate as, respectively, *The Book of the Path* and *The Book of Degrees and Stages*. The 'path' in the first title refers to the sevenfold hierarchy of believers, and the 'degrees and stages' in the second denotes its seven levels.

Humanity (*bashariyya*) in this scheme is in an intermediate position between the higher luminous (*ʿulwī nūrānī*) world and the lower (*suflī*) world of animals, plants and inanimate objects. Just as effort and piety can move a believer up this chain, so unbelief may move him downwards. Likewise, God manifests Himself to human beings by assuming their form, as do those who achieve the highest degree of the Path.[29]

One of the most systematic expositions of this teaching is found in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*. There, the spiritual 'Path' (*ṣirāṭ*)[30] leads a believer towards God and is traversed by means of the believer's exertions and the acquisition of the relevant knowledge.[31] The aim of ascending the

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[28] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 57.

[29] See, e.g. *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 262.

[30] The term used for the degrees of spiritual hierarchy is variously *ʿaqaba*, *manzila*, *martaba*, *daraja* and *rutba*. The word *ʿaqaba* means 'obstacle', 'difficulty' (see *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v. *ʿ-q-b*), but also a 'mountain road', and is used perhaps to underscore the difficulty of traversing the Path.

[31] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 153.

Path is, first, to escape the condition of humanity, which causes continuous, torturous rebirth in bodily forms, whether human (*naskh/nasūkhiyya*), or, worse, in animals and inanimate things (*maskh*, *waskh*, *raskh*, etc.), depending on the degree of one's sin. Secondly, ascending the Path is the only way to enter Paradise and to reach God. Entering Paradise, however, is only the outer (*ẓāhir*) aspect of ascending the Path. The inner (*bāṭin*) aspect is to acquire true knowledge, for, according to the author, 'Paradise is true ultimate knowledge.'[32]

The names of the seven degrees are generally speaking the same in all texts, while the slight differences in their ordering may be due to their similarity and a result of authorial choice as well as scribal error. The degrees are, in order of progression, the Tested (*mumtaḥan*), the Devout (*mukhlaṣ*), the Elect (*mukhtaṣṣ*), the Noble one (*najīb*), the Chief (*naqīb*), the Unique one (*yatīm*) and the Gate (*bāb*).[33] Some texts mention two Unique ones, one great and one small, the former being Miqdād b. ʿAmr b. Thaʿlaba (d. 33/653–654) and the latter Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652–653), two of the Prophet's famous companions. In some texts the sevenfold system is multiplied by seven, thus expanding to forty-nine, but the overall logic remains the same.[34]

At each of these degrees the disciple receives some more of the inner (*bāṭin*) knowledge, and having successfully internalised it, ascends into a higher position, acquiring a new 'shirt' (*qamīṣ*) – a metaphor used to denote a body that can be donned then shed.

After leaving the degree of humanity, human bodies acquire increasingly greater levels of purity and luminosity. Thus, the achievement of higher degrees enables the believer to wear new, purer 'shirts';[35] following the same logic, if the seeker becomes satisfied with the knowledge he has received and does not long for more, or if he doubts it and does not accept it, he will remain at the same degree, or may even lose his position and descend to lower ones, shedding his pure shirt of light, and acquiring one which is dirtier, darker and lower.[36]

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[32] Ibid., p. 81.

[33] Ibid., pp. 72–79.

[34] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 230, 243.

[35] See *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ,* pp. 115, 160.

[36] Ibid., pp. 130, 154, 157.

Higher degrees are achieved through performing good deeds,[37] and this ascent requires a firm commitment and great effort, and the inability or unwillingness to exert it results in severe punishment.[38] Likewise, those who have achieved a high degree are obliged to help those below them and bear responsibility for their progress, and the failure to give them adequate knowledge results in the punishment of both seeker and guide.

The idea of seven heavens, which in several other texts appears in the myth of the seven Adams, appears in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* (and *Kitāb al-anwār*) with each heaven as the seat of each of the seven degrees, the seventh and highest belonging to the Gates.[39] Having achieved this *daraja*, the believer becomes an angel and,[40] as affirmed by heresiographers, acquires miraculous abilities.[41] He can make himself invisible, can disappear, and nothing can be concealed from him. He finds whatever he desires without the need to seek for it, sees without having to be shown, and hears without having to listen. He can even see and hear God. At this stage the believer is freed of the duty to worship (*kharaja ʿan al-taʿabbud*), acquires freedom of choice, and knows without needing to be taught.

Those who reach the seventh degree of the Path also achieve the ability to manifest themselves to the material world. After reaching this degree, the believer may visit people by assuming human form, so that people do not know that he is from the upper world. He may also choose to become visible to one person only. During such visits, this believer may give advice to the people, command good and forbid evil, and save them from harm.[42]

The seven *darajāt* as a spiritual ladder, to be ascended by every diligent believer,[43] are paralleled by a more abstract picture in some texts in which an individual *daraja* is assigned to a particular person, and their number is limited. The author of *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, for whom the function of the degrees is to point to God's unicity (*tawḥīd*),

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[37] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 51.

[38] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 73.

[39] *Umm al-kitāb*, p. 79; Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 86.

[40] Ibid., p. 87.

[41] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 79–80.

[42] Ibid., pp. 34–35, 111–112.

[43] For an explicit reference, see Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 234.

presents the following picture: the closest to God is the Veil, being Muhammad, followed by the Gate, being Salsal (a code name for Salmān al-Fārisī),[44] followed by the greater Unique one that is Miqdād, then the smaller Unique one that is Abū Dharr, then the *nuqabāʾ*, who are twelve in number, and the *nujabāʾ* who are twenty-eight.[45] Then follow the degrees of the *mukhtaṣṣūn*, *mukhliṣūn* and *mumtaḥanūn*, the numbers of which are unspecified.[46] The number of *nuqabāʾ* and *nujabāʾ*, on the other hand, is equated in the same text with the number of the twelve zodiacal constellations and the twenty-eight stations of the moon, a concept also found in several other texts,[47] while thunder and lightning are equated with the two Unique ones.[48]

The texts thus present a twofold image of a spiritual degree. According to one, the *darajāt* are fixed entities assigned to particular individuals. According to the second, more 'democratic' version, they can be accessed by any believer.[49]

The believer's ascent to higher realms described here is mirrored in two different narratives. The most commonly attested version is the descent of an unbeliever into sub-human bodies of an increasingly lower order. A less frequently attested version is that of the 'degrees of unbelief' (*al-darajāt fī al-kufr*), a mirror image of the degrees of belief, similar in number and bearing the same names. According to *Kitāb al-haft*, 'whenever a believer ascends one step in goodness, an unbeliever descends one step in sin, in precisely the same manner.'[50] In contrast to the idea of transformation into non-human forms, the degrees of the unbelievers are said to be seven human bodies, through which they move until they become demons. The first is the Tested by unbelief

[44] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, p. 108; cf. al-Juʿfī, *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya*, p. 12.

[45] For a similar number, see Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, pp. 142–143.

[46] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 22; for a slightly different picture, see *Umm al-kitāb*, para. 198.

[47] Al-Juʿfī, *al-Risāla al-mufaḍḍaliyya*, p. 18; *Umm al-kitāb*, paras 68, 73–74; *KH*, p. 39; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, no doubt deriving his exposition from Ghulat lore, presents a similar scheme in his *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, p. 300; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 142.

[48] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 27.

[49] A passage from Muḥammad b. Sinān's *Kitāb al-ḥujub* (p. 51) presents both versions of this notion.

[50] *KH*, ch. 15, p. 45, cf. also ch. 51, p. 143.

(*mumtaḥan bi'l-kufr*), followed by the Chief in tyranny (*naqīb fī al-ṭughyān*), who is then followed by the degree of the Devout in sin and falsehood (*mukhliṣ fī al-ithm wa'l-buhtān*), and so on, until the unbeliever becomes a Gate in unbelief (*bāb fī al-kufr*), who summons people to sin and teaches them how to commit it. Transformation is unavoidable, according to *Kitāb al-haft*, for at the end of this downward journey the unbeliever becomes a demon and 'enters *masūkhiyya*', or simply enters it, according to the author of *Kitāb al-anwār*, who presents an almost identical image of the lower degrees.[51] In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, the seven degrees of unbelief form part of a sevenfold scheme of the universe, whereby each degree is held by one of the seven demons, presiding in one of the seven levels of Hell in one of the seven earths.[52] In the partially preserved *Kitāb al-marātib*, in which, judging by its title the idea of 'levels and degrees' is a central motif, the seven upper and seven lower degrees were created by God when some of the people accepted, and some rejected, His call. Believers and unbelievers were assigned to particular degrees of belief or unbelief based on the order of their precedence in accepting or rejecting His call.[53]

Transmigration and the Dark World of Matter

Belief in the transmigration of human souls is one of the best-known of the Ghulat teachings. References to it are dispersed throughout the Corpus and are found in the heresiographical literature; it was held by

[51] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 87.

[52] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 39–40; the passage suggests that each demon holds only one degree of unbelief and that each earth has only one level of Hell, but the overall logic of the passage seems to indicate this. *Kitāb al-ḥujub* (p. 53) has a brief paragraph which speaks of 'seven higher (*ʿulwiyya*) and seven lower (*sufliyya*)' degrees, the latter being the seven gates of Hell from Q. 15:44. Although the explanation of the number seven and the lower degrees is different from that in *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, the overall discussion echoes the latter's paras 40–41 in that it significantly employs the same Qurʾanic verse.

[53] *Kitāb al-marātib*, quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 230; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 185; al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 83; cf. also Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 55; Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 87; and *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 139.

the Ghulat rebels of the early 2nd/8th century,[54] and by the Mukhammisa described by al-Qummī at the turn of the 3rd/9th.[55] The latter's pithy description of the group's belief summarises all the important points of the teaching as attested in other texts: they believe in *tanāsukh*, he writes, claiming that the souls of those who deny their doctrines are reborn in all kinds of bodies, human, non-human, edible, potable – in every sort of animal or object that exists on earth, and even in the stars and planets.

Transmigration is a 'change from a laudable condition into a blameworthy one',[56] it necessitates suffering and is at times equated with Hell.[57] As the darker counterpart of ascent into the luminous world, it is described by using the imagery of donning new shirts (*qumṣān*) – only these shirts are darker and narrower;[58] or donning a clean shirt and sullying it through contact with filth.[59] Yet another metaphor is that of movement and transfer, denoted by the derivatives of the root *n-q-l*: *nuqla* 'transfer', *manqūl* 'transferred', *yatanaqqal* 'is transferred' and so on.[60]

The word *tanāsukh*, which al-Qummī uses as a generic term for transmigration in general, in more detailed accounts stands for rebirth in human bodies only. It is the lightest of punishments and is followed by graver ones – rebirth in animals, plants and inanimate things – depending on the seriousness of one's sin. These lower degrees of

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[54] Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 55; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, pp. 233–234; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, p. 11; al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh wa'l-radd ʿalā ahl al-ahwāʾ wa'l-bidaʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Zaynham Muḥammad ʿAzb (Cairo, 1413/1992), p. 16; Tucker, *Mahdis*, pp. 52–70; cf. al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, pp. 308–310; al-Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil*, p. 38; Crone, *Nativist*, pp. 92–95; 233–251.

[55] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 58–59; on the date of the work, see Madelung, 'Bemerkungen', p. 38.

[56] *Kitāb al-kashf*, p. 90.

[57] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 265; Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 213, 232.

[58] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 265; al-Shalmaghānī believed that the truth is one but that its 'shirts' are many, referring, no doubt, to the bodily form assumed by the incarnate divinity, al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 251.

[59] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 186.

[60] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 268; *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 128–129, 165; al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 59; *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 74, 88, 90, 95, 126–127; Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, pp. 29–30.

transformation are described in a detailed manner in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*. According to its author, while good deeds move the believer up that Path and closer to God, unbelief and the rejection of His call result in continuous rebirth into human or sub-human forms. Souls which do not merit the ascent to the higher realms become reborn in a material form – human, animal, plant or mineral. Like the degrees of the upper world, the different types of transformation are arranged in a hierarchical order. Rebirth in other human bodies is called *nasūkhiyya* or *naskh*, derivatives of the same Arabic root as *tanāsukh*. Graver sins are punished by transformation into lower degrees of existence, such as animals (*maskh* or *masūkhiyya*), plants and minerals (*raskh*).[61] While it is not indicated explicitly, the text leaves one with the impression that transformation happens after an individual's death rather than during his lifetime.[62] Other texts, however, suggest that metamorphosis might occur while the individual is still alive.[63]

One aspect of the discussion of transformation in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* is tied into the idea of a universal balance between opposites, which is connected to the idea of God's justice, who '[treats all people] equally, and judges them with one judgment, which is the same for both worlds, the luminous world and the dark world'.[64] Opposites in the world are balanced in that they follow one another, are equal, and one always takes from the other what is owed. Natural phenomena, day and night, the successive historical manifestations of truth and lie, and finally, the world of humans and *musūkh*, all obey this law, which brings everything into equilibrium.[65] With regard to reincarnation, the idea of balance is expressed in the principle that one 'returns what one owes' and 'takes back what is owed', which regulates the relationships between two individuals who alternatively incarnate in two different forms. As a result of the balance that exists in this relationship, 'the

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[61] For a list of transformations, see *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 129, 138.

[62] Ibid., p. 185: *ḥulūl fi'l-bashariyya* 'incarnation in humanity'; ibid., p. 190: 'His soul feels an inclination for the species which he had descended (*ḥalla*) into before.'

[63] Cf. *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 11, 13; the reference here is not explicit but suggests that transformation is a punishment occurring during this life; paras 31–32 indicate, though rather more directly, that the transformation occurs during a person's life; however, there is evidence to the contrary as well, cf. para. 45.

[64] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 163.

[65] Ibid., pp. 146, 174–175, 177, 203.

object (*mafʿūl bihi*) receives compensation from the agent (*fāʿil*)'.[66] For example, when someone is killed by iron, he then becomes transformed into iron, and iron becomes transformed into a human being, 'so the one who has been cut [by that iron] cuts his cutter'; a person who decorates himself with a decoration, eventually becomes transformed into this decoration, and vice versa, so the decoration then decorates itself with that person.

A similar balance exists in the relationship between the sexes. A Muslim man may marry a Christian woman, who afterwards becomes incarnated into a Muslim man, and marries her former husband, now a Christian woman.[67] *Kitāb al-ḥujub* echoes this, saying that a woman is reborn a man, and a man is reborn a woman, so that she may take from him what he had taken from her, probably referring to sexual intercourse. This, the author writes, 'is because of God's justice'.[68]

> In short . . . those who were formerly being carried, will carry their carriers, those who were killed will kill their killers, subjects will rule their sovereigns, and those who were ridden will ride their riders.[69]

In its version of the teaching about reincarnation, *Kitāb al-haft* follows a similar scheme, introducing a further nuance. The discussion here is based on the two premises that, first, 'women are inferior to men' and, second, that believers only become transformed into 'shapes that are better, and move to stations that are higher', while unbelievers only descend into lower forms. Following this logic, a believing man cannot be transformed into a woman, but a believing woman does indeed become a man on her path to perfection, never to return into a female body again.

The text then moves from humans that have moved from one sex to another to animals. Here, however, the logic is different: whereas in humans, male is better than female, in animals edible is better than inedible. Hence the better, edible, animals are reborn as the opposite sex of the same species to preserve this superior quality of theirs, whereas the bad and inedible ones are reborn as the same sex in

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[66] Ibid., pp. 182–189.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 45.

[69] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 182–189.

increasingly lower forms. Eventually, this second type becomes so degraded that other animals dread and hate it more even than the believers and unbelievers hate each other.[70]

The deterministic image of the inevitable descent of the unbelievers into lower forms is not shared by all the accounts. *Kitāb al-akwār*, for example, continues the metaphor of the body as a shirt that can be sullied by contact with filth, stating that it can likewise be washed and made clean and pleasant again.[71] In *Kitāb al-mithāl*, having undergone a transformation and suffered according to the degree of their sins, the unbelievers actually 'fulfill their dues' (*qaḍaw mā ʿalayhim*, lit. 'they accomplished what they owe'), and return to the condition of humanity.[72] Finally, the author of *Kitāb al-ḥujub* even writes that God Himself calls the people from *masūkhiyya* back to humanity, then appears to them (*yatajallā*) and calls them to know Him and to obey him. If they obey He befriends them, and if they refuse to do so He returns them to suffering.[73]

The terminology employed for the various types of transformation comes with slight variations, perhaps due to their similar phonetic form. Thus, in his account of the Ghulat belief in types of rebirth, the Ismaili heresiographer Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī defines *raskh* as transformation into 'types of plants and trees' (*anwāʿ al-shajar wa'l-nabāt*), while explaining *faskh* as transformation into 'the animals of earth and water and insects', such as snakes, scorpions, dung beetles, worms, crayfish and turtles.[74] The terms *masūkhiyya* and *maskh* denote both the process of transformation and the bodies into which the person is transformed.[75] A complete inventory of the types of transformation is

[70] *KH*, ch. 54, p. 147, ch. 55, p. 149, ch. 56, pp. 151–152.

[71] *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 186.

[72] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 232.

[73] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 21.

[74] Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīnā*, p. 308.

[75] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 215; *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 11, 15, 44; *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 123; *Kitāb al-marātib*, in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 232 and al-Jillī, *al-Ḥāwī*, p. 187.

found in al-Khaṣībī's work, whose knowledge of Ghulat literature makes his account a reliable synthesis of their beliefs.[76]

Divine Man and Man of God

Although the notion that God could appear to human beings in the earthly material world and that human beings could ascend a spiritual path towards God seems to have been central to the beliefs of the Ghulat, they adhered to a variety of ideas about God's relationship with human beings. Two of these views are sufficiently well documented (both in Ghulat and extra-Ghulat material) to merit a separate discussion. One is the teaching attributed to the two groups called the Mukhammisa and the ʿAlyāʾiyya, who divinised the five of the Prophet Muhammad's family, that is to say the Prophet himself, his cousin ʿAlī and his daughter Fāṭima, and their sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The second is the view that God delegated (*fawwaḍa*) the creation of the world to certain individuals; or, that having created it, He delegated them to care for it. The heresiographers attributed these teachings to discrete groups with separate names, but a reading of the Ghulat Corpus reveals that the people who variously held them did not constitute distinct groups in the Ghulat community. Moreover, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, more than one of these beliefs, for instance the Imam's divinisation and the idea of his delegation, could coexist in one and the same text. The discussion that follows, therefore, is merely an attempt to classify and describe these two types of belief as attested in Ghulat writings, and it does not claim to present them as separate theological systems developed by separate sects.

The *Umm al-kitāb*, the largest text containing Mukhammisa elements, would appear to identify all five persons of the pentad with God, presenting them as five eternal (*qadīm*) lights created before all else, from whose beams everything came into being. In their humanity they are Muhammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. They are seated on the divine throne (*takhtgāh-i īzadī*) at the head of the believers, and all the groups of five found in nature (such as the five

[76] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 105–106; on the Nuṣayrī uses of the Ghulat literature, see Chapter 4 and my 'Shiite Underground Literature', pp. 145–147.

fingers) are derived from their light.[77] In the so-called 'School Anecdote', their divinity is asserted more openly, when God successively manifests Himself to ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ in the form of this pentad, each time openly declaring His divinity.[78] Other Ghulat texts present a similar picture, with the difference that ʿAlī is substituted with the aforementioned Muḥsin, ʿAli's third, unborn son, killed by ʿUmar while still in Fāṭima's womb. In keeping with the symbolic interpretation of the number five, the five canonical daily prayers are said to be the members of the pentad (with Muḥsin instead of ʿAlī),[79] the five are united in one,[80] and God is said to appear in five individuals, one female and four male.[81] Finally, the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, calls the five members of the Prophet's family God's five lights whom He made from His own light.[82]

A similar version of the Mukhammisa doctrine was espoused by a group whom the heresiographers called the ʿAlyāʾiyya, who believed in the divinity of the same five members of the Prophet's family, but gave ʿAlī priority over Muhammad, viewing the latter to be ʿAlī's envoy to humanity.[83] Whether they indeed considered Muhammad to be subservient to ʿAlī is unclear, but one Ghulat text does indeed state that ʿAlī is God and Muhammad his apostle, while also accepting that He manifests Himself in the said five individuals.[84]

The teachings about 'delegation', or *tafwīḍ*, can be dated from the

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[77] *Umm al-kitāb*, paras 81–83, 96–98, 113.

[78] Ibid., paras 39–42; Anthony, 'The Legend', p. 27; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 132–133.

[79] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 113.

[80] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 62.

[81] This is from a tradition found in the Nuṣayrī collection entitled *Majmaʿ al-akhbār* in *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawi* (Lebanon, 2008), vol. 8, p. 63, narrated on the authority of Dāwūd b. Kathīr al-Raqqī, an 'extremist' who died after 200/815, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 153.

[82] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 172.

[83] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 59; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, p. 307; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, vol. 1, p. 179; Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, p. 66.

[84] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, pp. 263–265; the authorship of the text is as obscure as that of any other Ghulat writing; however, among its narrators one finds the name of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhaʿī, who was said to be a follower of the group, see Chapter 3. This places the production of the text in the latter part of the 3rd/9th century.

2nd/8th and up to the end of the 4th/10th century.[85] For instance, it is alleged that Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī once said that the Imams distributed the sustenance of men; at another time, having argued about the divinity of the Imams with his friends, he decided to ask the Imam, who assured him that the Imams are but venerable servants of God who say nothing before He does, and who listen to His command.[86] Two centuries later, a certain Muḥammad b. al-Muẓaffar Abū Dulaf al-Azdī al-Kātib is said to have been a madman who adhered to the teachings of the Mufawwiḍa (and the Mukhammisa).[87]

The Ghulat texts contain numerous references to the delegation of the Prophet Muhammad, whom at times they call *al-makān*, and who sometimes appears as a creator, and sometimes is simply charged with managing God's creation. The author of *Kitāb al-tanbīh* writes that '*al-makān* is the creator of things, he is His servant, listening and obedient to God, who created him unlike the human beings He created, but He created him from light.'[88] In *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, Muhammad is the first created thing, to whom God delegated the affairs of the world.[89] The author of *Kitāb al-akwār* attributes the words 'we created' to the *mīm*, that is, Muhammad.[90]

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[85] The teaching was also adhered to by Nuṣayrī authors, cf. al-Jillī, *Risālat al-fatq*, p. 315; idem, *al-Risāla al-nuʿmāniyya*, p. 304; ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥujja*, p. 240; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, pp. 37, 56.

[86] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 271, 273.

[87] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, pp. 254–256.

[88] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 203.

[89] *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, paras 1, 3, 13–14,

[90] Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 57; cf. also pp. 111–112. *Umm al-kitāb* contains an idiosyncratic story where ʿAzāzaʾīl creates with the light that he borrowed from God and begins to boast about it, claiming that he is also a god. God reprimands him and says that everything, including ʿAzāzaʾīl and whatever he had made, is ultimately created by Him, see paras 124–126.

Antinomianism and the Esoteric Meaning of Religious Duties

One of the staple accusations levelled against the Ghulat is *ibāḥa*, antinomianism, the abolition of religious laws and prohibitions.[91] Al-Qummī, for example, claimed that according to the Mukhammisa, for those who acquire the knowledge of the seven degrees, observing the law becomes unnecessary, and many things hitherto forbidden are permitted to them, such as sexual promiscuity, homosexuality and so on.[92]

Given the biased nature of such writings, however, one is entirely justified in viewing these allegations as hostile propaganda.[93] It is in this context, as noted in Chapter 2, that the part of *Kitāb al-haft* that argues against the possibility of any believer being a homosexual should be considered; it states that it is a 'sickness to which all believers are immune'.[94] The chapter was probably written in response to the accusations that the Ghulat permitted sexual license.

However, was this attitude shared by all the Ghulat? Were all the heresiographic allegations of antinomianism hostile propaganda and nothing more? The belief that religious duties become redundant once a believer achieves a certain degree of spiritual perfection is noted in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and *Kitāb al-haft*. In Chapter 13 in the latter work it says that for him who has internalised the inner truth about the degrees of belief,

> the external (*ẓāhir*) acts of worship become unnecessary. If he reaches them, and knows them station after station, and degree after degree, he will become free (*ḥurr*); the servitude (*ʿubūdiyya*) [of God] will become unnecessary for him, and he will leave the state of being owned for the state of being free by reaching the end [of his spiritual quest] and by his knowledge.[95]

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[91] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, p. 10; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 38; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, p. 571; according to Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī, the 'extremist' Muḥammad b. Jumhūr wrote poetry permitting forbidden things (*Rijāl*, p. 92).

[92] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 58.

[93] Tucker, *Mahdis*, p. 114; Buckley, 'The Early Shiite *Ghulāh*', p. 314; Hodgson, 'Early Shīʿa', p. 7; Bausani, *Religion in Iran: From Zoroaster to Baha'ullah*, trans. J. M. Marchesi (New York, 2000), p. 140.

[94] *KH*, ch. 53, p. 145.

[95] *KH*, ch. 13, p. 42.

This is echoed in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, where this freedom is achieved upon reaching the seventh station of belief, when the believer becomes liberated (*muḥarrar*)[96] and free of the duty to worship (*kharaja ʿan al-taʿabbud*).[97] These passages seem to give partial confirmation of the heresiographers' allegation that the Ghulat taught the abolition of religious laws. However, it is not clear whether these ideas were followed in real life, or whether they constituted a theological abstraction.

There is, however, a more direct hint to this effect in Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, which states that singing and homosexuality (*liwāṭ*) have a blameworthy as well as a praiseworthy aspect. Isḥāq writes that 'the praiseworthy one is to seek the knowledge of *tawḥīd* from someone who is more knowledgeable than you', and in this situation, the more knowledgeable one is male and the seeker is female.[98] *Kitāb al-ḥujub* tells us that God brought forth an 'esoteric (*bāṭin*) intercourse (*nikāḥ*), which is the intercourse of knowledge (*ʿilm*)', when someone gives the knowledge of God's oneness to him who does not have it.[99] This would seem to be an allegorical reference, given the use of the term *bāṭin*. But whether these images of the transfer of knowledge are simply an allegory or not is open to speculation, and the present state of knowledge does not allow for a definitive answer. What is clear is that it was ideas like these that prompted later historians and heresiographers to accuse the Ghulat of sexual license. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), for example, writes that according to the famous Ghali Abū Jaʿfar al-Shalmaghānī, 'it is incumbent upon him who is superior to sexually penetrate someone who is inferior, in order to insert the light into him'.[100]

One of the 'accusations', however, is amply confirmed by the Ghulat themselves. It is an explanation of the abolition of religious duties and

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[96] Cf. Capezzone, 'Il Kitāb al-Ṣirāt', p. 312.

[97] The expression *yatakhallaṣu min jamīʿ mā kāna ʿalayhi* could also be interpreted in a similar way, 'he will become liberated from all his obligations', see *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 79.

[98] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 167–168.

[99] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 28.

[100] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fiʾl-taʾrīkh*, vol. 7, p. 17; cf. *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, p. 263.

prohibitions; briefly stated, it is the idea that all the obligations and prohibitions are individual personages, and that worship is simply knowing these personages.

The earliest recorded instance of this idea seems to be found among the Khaṭṭābiyya, who 'named all duties after certain men and did the same with vile acts' according to al-Nawbakhtī.[101] In a *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Kashshī, Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq writes to Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, 'It has come to my attention that you claim that fornication is a man, that wine is a man, that fasting is a man and that the abominations (*fawāḥish*) are a man.'[102] Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī records a lengthy tradition where the Imam addresses Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī on the same matter, refuting Mufaḍḍal's alleged claim that according to Jaʿfar, the knowledge of an Imam makes fasting and prayer redundant.[103] According to al-Ashʿarī, a similar view was espoused by Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb's contemporary Abū Manṣūr al-ʿIjlī, namely, that 'he claimed that Paradise is a man and that Hellfire is a man'.[104] A century later a certain ʿAlī b. Ḥasaka and al-Qāsim al-Yaqṭīnī claimed that prayer was a man and not mere prostration, and that almsgiving was that same man and had nothing to do with dinars; and that knowing the Imam was equal to all the religious obligations.[105] Finally, ʿAbd al-Jabbār ascribes this belief to the Ghulat in general, without specifying any particular group.[106]

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[101] Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 38; trans. into English as *Shīʿa Sects* by Abbas Khadhim (London, 2007), p. 93.

[102] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 246; translation by Ron Buckley in 'The Imām', p. 126.

[103] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, pp. 546–555; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 272.

[104] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, p. 9; see also Dakake, *Charismatic*, p. 130.

[105] Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 430–431.

[106] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 20, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo, 1969), p. 173; for other external references to this idea, see Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī', p. 167. The 4th/10th-century Ismaili author Abū Tammām attributes a similar teaching to the Mubayyiḍa, the followers of al-Muqannaʿ, a near-contemporary of Mufaḍḍal who rebelled in eastern Iran in the second half of the 2nd/8th century, see W. Madelung and P. Walker, ed. and trans., *An Ismaili Heresiography: The 'Bāb al-shayṭān' from Abū Tammām's* Kitāb al-shajara (Leiden, 1998), p. 76; cf. P. Crone, 'Abū Tammām on the Mubayyiḍa', in Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, ed., *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London, 2011), p. 171.

In the Ghulat Corpus, this notion is attested to in several major writings. In *Kitāb al-haft*, Jaʿfar tells Mufaḍḍal that after reaching the degree of *mukhliṣ*, one commands the believing *shīʿa* to pray and to give alms.[107] When Mufaḍḍal asks the Imam what that means, Jaʿfar tells him that 'prayer is ʿAlī, alms is the knowledge of him, and performing (*iqāma*) prayer is knowing and performing us [i.e. the Imams]'.[108] The author of *Ḥaqāʾiq* quotes a slightly longer version of this passage, which further elaborates that in religious duties, bodily actions do not matter, but rather it is the 'inner' (*bāṭin*) aspect that counts, and that 'mentioning one's Lord, i.e. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, means praying'.[109] Further, in *Kitāb al-haft*, in his discussion of the *darajāt* Jaʿfar tells Mufaḍḍal that the one who knows these degrees becomes free of the necessity to worship and achieves freedom, whereas the fetters of worship are put upon those who fall short (*muqaṣṣirūn*).[110]

Kitāb al-ḥujub begins the theme with a discussion of the days of the week, assigning the names of personages to some of them.[111] Monday is the Veil (who, it later turns out, is Muhammad or Jesus), Tuesday is Fāṭir (i.e. Fāṭima), Wednesday is Ḥasan and Thursday is Ḥusayn.[112] Some of the prayers also stand for individuals thus: the Veil, Fāṭima,[113] Ḥasan, Muḥsin and Ḥusayn. Later on, the author explicitly says that 'whosoever knows the *khums*, [the payment of] *khums* becomes redundant for him' (without clarifying who it stands for). The knowledge of the Veil, the Gate, the Unique Ones, the Chiefs and the Nobles, and the assertion of the sovereignty of the Meaning, is equal to performing the Pilgrimage.[114] Not only duties, however, but vile things are also allegories, in this instance of vile people: the idols and divining arrows, mentioned in Qurʾan 5:90, are, accordingly,

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[107] Jaʿfar quotes Q. 19:55 {He commanded his household to pray and give alms}.

[108] *KH*, ch. 12, p. 39.

[109] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 108.

[110] *KH*, p. 41.

[111] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, pp. 34–35.

[112] They are referred to as 'the first *ḥāʾ*' and 'the second *ḥāʾ*' (*ḥāʾ al-awwal*, *ḥāʾ al-thānī*); following the logic of naming Muhammad *mīm*, ʿAlī *ʿayn*, and Salmān *sīn*, the reference becomes clear.

[113] Called *fāʾ*, cf. the previous note.

[114] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 44.

Zaghlūl[115] and the Umayyads.[116] Finally, *Kitāb al-anwār* states that the true meaning of prostration (*sujūd*) is the existent, high, knowing Lord, that is, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[117]

Another source that speaks about the esoteric interpretation of religious duties is Isḥāq al-Aḥmar's partially preserved *Bāṭin al-taklīf* (The Inner Meaning of Obligations), the very title of which is a reference to its contents. Isḥāq writes that the knowledge of ʿAlī and uttering Muhammad's name with a truthful utterance (*bi-ḥaqīqat al-dhikr*) equal prayer,[118] and the inner meaning of almsgiving is the knowledge of the Imams.[119] In a passage that appears to be a quotation from a book tellingly entitled *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* (The Book of Persons), Isḥāq al-Aḥmar equates different parts of the Kaʿba with members o the Prophet's family,[120] and the five prayers with the pentad of the Mukhammisa, Muhammad, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Fāṭir and Muḥsin.[121] Countless further passages about the allegorical interpretation of religious duties and prohibitions are quoted by Nuṣayrī authors on the authority of Ghulat individuals such as Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī and Isḥāq al-Aḥmar.[122]

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[115] This name might be an error.

[116] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, p. 60.

[117] Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, p. 74.

[118] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 112.

[119] Ibid., p. 172; in fact, the author distinguishes between the first, second and third 'inner meaning' (*bāṭin*), the first being the knowledge of the Imams, the second the knowledge of the Gates, and the third, giving the brethren their due consolation.

[120] The passage begins with the following statement: وقال إسحاق في كتاب باطن التكليف وقال مؤلف كتاب الأشخاص 'Isḥāq said in *Kitāb bāṭin al-taklīf*, and the author of *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ* said', see Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 174–75; cf. Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-ḥujub*, pp. 37–38.

[121] Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, *Bāṭin al-taklīf*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 113; on Fāṭir and Muḥsin, see above.

[122] Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī devotes an entire chapter in his *Ḥaqāʾiq* to the allegorical meaning of religious obligations, called 'The Knowledge of Glorified Persons, and that it is the Inner [Meaning] of Obligations that are Commanded' (*Maʿrifat al-ashkhāṣ al-maḥmūda wa-annahā bāṭin al-taklīf al-maʾmūr bih*), pp. 108–121, see also pp. 173, 175, 177.

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Constructing a Community

The writings that are here collectively called the 'Ghulat corpus', produced and circulated in Iraq during the 2nd to 3rd/8th to 9th centuries, appear to be a confusing multitude with uncertain dates and authorship, and it is hoped some order has been established regarding our knowledge of the subject. The preceding chapters have examined the contexts in which these works were written and circulated, and the cosmological ideas they articulate, and have classified some of the texts into subgroups. They have proposed rough timeframes of composition and circulation for a number of these texts and have studied the manner in which some of them were compiled from initially unrelated parts.

Based on this information, the following broad phases of the history of the Ghulat can be suggested: initially, in the latter part of the 2nd/8th century, the Ghulat were an organic part of the wider Shiʿi community. This was a time when a distinct Shiʿi identity was beginning to emerge, but the main divisions that later would become established in Shiʿism, and in Islam more broadly, had not yet crystallised. Hence the Ghulat were not yet viewed by the Imāmīs as a distinct 'heretical' group that had 'split' from a 'majority'. They not only interacted on a regular basis with non-Ghulat, but were at times very close to the Imams themselves.

Later on, sometime in the 3rd/9th century, the Ghulat's relations with the broader Shiʿi community began to deteriorate. This process coincided with the struggle for authority in the community after the death of their eleventh Imam and the disappearance of his infant son. With no living Imam present to guide the community, a new concept of authority had to be formulated. Several of the Ghulat advanced claims to be in contact with the Twelfth, Hidden Imam, seeking authorisation to lead the community. All their attempts to gain

influence in this way, however, were repelled by representatives of the 'moderate' camp of Shiʿis.

The marginalisation of the Ghulat must not, however, be reduced to the failure of attempts by some of them to assert their authority over the Imāmī community, or to their 'unorthodox' religious views. While the underlying social, and possibly economic, reasons for this process have yet to be studied, a broader view of the Shiʿi community in Iraq in the period may shed some light on the matter. Late in the 3rd/9th and early in the 4th/10th century some Imāmī thinkers were in the process of formulating what was to become a Twelver Shiʿi doctrine, which entailed creating a new conception of authority that would allow them to fit into the broader ʿAbbasid society, and to regulate affairs within their own community in the absence of an Imam.[1] The Ghulat also adhered to some elements of the newly emerging Twelver doctrine, such as a conception of exclusivity and a reluctance to share their beliefs with others, known in Imāmī thought as *taqiyya*.[2] The orientations of the two groups with regard to the larger society, however, were diametrically opposed. Unlike the Imāmīs, who were in the process of opening up to the greater ʿAbbasid society by developing a more accomodationist doctrine,[3] the Ghulat showed no such signs, and the distinction between insider and outsider in their writings of this period is as clear as it was before. With its esoteric and elitist ethos that entailed adherence to antinomian concepts, the worldview of the Ghulat reflected a deep rift between themselves and the larger society and the state. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in this period, early in the 4th/10th century, a branch of the Ghulat, the Nuṣayrīs, migrated to Syria. Syria was geographically distant from the central ʿAbbasid government and the centres of Imāmī Shiʿism, providing for the Nuṣayrīs a new home where they were able to preserve and further develop their written heritage, as was discussed in Chapter 4.

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[1] Arjomand, 'The Consolation of Theology', pp. 548–571; Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya', p. 533; Dakake, *Charismatic*, pp. 177–189.

[2] Dakake, *Charismatic*, p. 240; E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shīʿī Theology and Religion', in Hans Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa, ed., *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 345–380.

[3] Dakake, *Charismatic*, p. 179.

Other than these broad statements, little is known about the everyday life of the Ghulat, about their attitudes to others, and about their view of themselves within a larger society. The reason for this lack of knowledge has been the near-absence of references to contemporaneous people and events in Ghulat texts and, in turn, the paucity of external references to them. The abstract vocabulary that was used to describe the importance of the 'Gates' in some of the texts from the period of the Minor Occultation, when Ghulat claimants to 'Gatehood' of the Hidden Imam were trying to gain legitimacy and influence within the Imāmī community should be borne in mind. Like these passages, with the exception of a few references to the ʿAbbasid government or to historical personalities (such as Mālik b. Anas, Abu'l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, al-Shāfiʿī and Abū Ḥanīfa),[4] most of the surviving Ghulat writings contain rather abstract depictions of the universe and myths of the creation and fall. Despite the limited amount of direct references this material provides, however, some of it can be used to reconstruct the worldview of the Ghulat and their image of themselves *vis-à-vis* the rest of humanity. For their abstract vocabulary and spiritual imagery notwithstanding, worldviews and cosmologies are articulated by human beings who use them to advance their own interests and mundane agenda.[5]

The last pages of this book will discuss the scant evidence that may help us better understand the Ghulat community, focusing on two types of evidence. They will first discuss the direct references in Ghulat texts to contemporary institutions and people. Secondly, they will analyse how the Ghulat positioned themselves against outsiders, and

[4] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 197.

[5] Bruce Lincoln has analysed the connection between myth and cosmology on the one hand, and the interests of their authors (and readers) on the other, using examples ranging from Old-Iranian demonology to contemporary American political ideology. Some of his works, which have influenced the analysis presented in this chapter, include the following: 'How to Read a Religious Text', in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago, 2012), pp. 5–15; 'The Cosmo-logic of Persian Demonology', ibid., pp. 31–42; 'Between History and Myth', ibid., pp. 53–62; *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 2006), especially Chapter 6, 'Religion, Rebellion, Revolution', pp. 77–92. For a case-study of the reflection of historical processes in myth, see J. Smith, 'The Unknown God: Myth in History', *Imagining Religion from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 66–89.

their efforts to construct social boundaries through the use of cosmological imagery and by ranking people based on their degrees of purity. These findings will be supported with evidence from the history of the Ghulat corpus as a whole.

A few words about the use of individual texts for drawing conclusions about the entire Ghulat community are in order. The reasoning is the same as in Chapter 3.[6] The texts of the Ghulat corpus exhibit a great degree of uniformity, with a continuously recycled inventory of motifs expressed in a uniform vocabulary. Secondly, individual texts extensively quote one another and are quoted in groups by later Nuṣayrī authors. Finally, they are almost never mentioned by non-Ghulat authors.[7] This suggests a shared textual environment, one where a common inventory of texts circulated among a limited number of people, who read one another's works, copied them and cited them in their own writings. At the same time, they were reluctant to allow any non-Ghulat to read their works; this is the reason, perhaps, why the two most venerated (or indeed divinised) individuals found in these texts, Muhammad and ʿAlī, are often referred to by the cryptic epithets of *mīm* and *ʿayn*. Such exclusive sharing of texts and ideas thus indicates, as argued earlier, a shared worldview and, by extension, a shared social world. Exactly what kind of a world this was will be discussed in the pages that follow.

'Thou shalt not Claim Hāshimite Kinship!': the Ghulat and the ʿAbbasids

One of the major surviving Ghulat texts, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, presents a detailed picture of the Ghulat universe, an important part of which involves the transformation of sinners into sub-human bodies and objects. At one point this discussion veers into a condemnation of those who falsely claim to be related by blood to ʿAlī (here equated with God). These, the author writes, will enter into the world of metamorphosis, becoming deadly poisons.[8] Further on, he says that of the people who claim to be related to God by kinship, only those who

[6] See pp. 137–138.

[7] The exceptions are discussed in Chapter 5.

[8] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 162.

have true knowledge and believe in God's oneness deserve this lofty position. The rest are lost and will gradually descend into lower, sub-human forms. Nothing is said of the identity of the claimants yet, but in what follows more details emerge. A distinction is made between those who claim to be related to ʿAlī and those who claim kinship with Muhammad (the two being called by their epithets, *ʿayn* and *mīm*): the former become transformed into 'lovely pigeons, or ringdoves, or birds that speak and answer . . . they are in waters, in the sea, in rivers, in fishes, such as carp, starlet… and in all comely and tasty sorts [of fish]'. Some of those who claim to be related to Muhammad are also transformed into beautiful animals, such as proud steeds, but some become snakes in the sea because they are at various stages and degrees of evil (*manāzil wa-rutab*), some of them are therefore better than others.[9]

With regard to this latter group, the author uses a keyword which gives a further clue as to their identity. They are the ones, he writes, who 'claim kinship with the Hāshimites' (*al-Hāshimiyya*), who took pride in Muhammad'.[10] The use of the term *al-Hāshimiyya* and the stress on Muhammad rather than ʿAlī in this story is not incidental. The movement that in 132/750 brought the ʿAbbasid dynasty to power was called the Hāshimiyya, after the Prophet's ancestor Hāshim. The ʿAbbasids adopted this name to show their affinity to Muhammad's family (*āl Muḥammad*) as a means of legitimising their claim to the caliphate.[11] It is to them, therefore, that the author of *Kitāb al-ṣiraṭ* alludes in writing about the Hāshimiyya's claim to be related to Muhammad. Writing roughly in the same period, Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī echoes this statement in his description of the Mukhammisa, the followers of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and Bashshār al-Shaʿīrī, who reportedly believed that 'anyone who claimed to be of the family of the Prophet (*āl Muḥammad*) is a liar and a falsifier of his lineage'.[12]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 164–165.

[10] Ibid., pp. 165, cf. also p. 164.

[11] S. Agha, *The Revolution which Toppled the Umayyads* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 100–102.

[12] Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 60; the passage is repeated almost verbatim in al-Kashshī's *Rijāl*, p. 401, adding the ʿAlyāʾiyya, and substituting Bashshār al-Shaʿīrī with the followers of Muḥammad b. Bashīr. The author of another roughly contemporary

The author of *Kitāb al-sirāṭ* uses the theme of transformation to launch a much more direct attack against the legitimacy of the ʿAbbasids. In discussing the properties of metals and minerals, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* notes three pairs of substances arranged in a hierarchical order: gold-copper (or brass), silver-lead, and iron-stone.[13] These substances are related to one another as a result of their similarity (*mujānasa*) – gold to copper and brass, silver to lead, and iron to stone. The underlying reason for this similarity, however, lies in their previous, human incarnations: copper and brass are like gold because their human persons were the followers and helpers of the person of gold in its human form, and the same logic applies to the other pairs. This similarity thus also implies a hierarchical relationship, where the follower is inferior to the one followed.[14]

The relationship between the principal elements of these pairs – gold, silver and iron – is also hierarchical and, as in the previous case, this is a result of the relationships between their human prototypes. Thus, gold is more expensive than silver because its human incarnation, the caliph ʿUmar, was more powerful than the incarnation of silver, that is, Abū Bakr. (Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, early Imāmī and Ghulat literature contains stories showing that ʿUmar was perceived to be more evil than Abū Bakr.) By the same token, silver ranks higher than iron because Abū Bakr was superior to ʿUthmān, the human prototype of iron. The hierarchy is not explicitly explained in terms of the degrees of evil, but ʿUmar/gold is said to be 'the cursed enemy and the pelted Satan, the root of tyranny and unbelief', and the other two are said to have obeyed him.[15] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* thus presents six pairs, in which the elements of each are related by likeness, while the leading (left) elements of each pair are arranged hierarchically. The diagram below shows their relations schematically.

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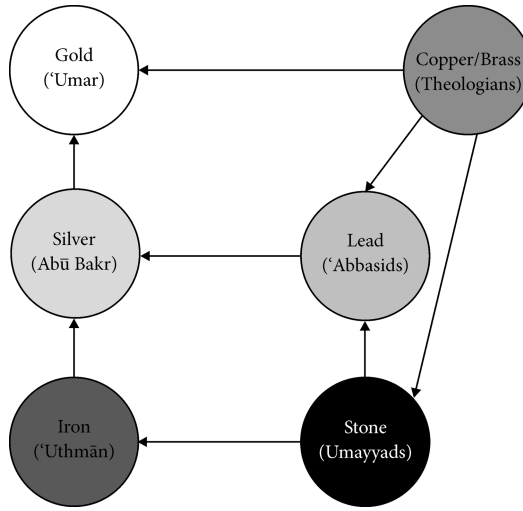
text, *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭālib* (p. 268), writes that 'he who says "I am one of ʿAlī's offspring" is a follower of an idol (*min awliyāʾ al-ṭāghūt*), and he who says "I am one of Fāṭima's sons" oscillates between various degrees of Hellfire'. In this case, those whom the text accuses might be related to the first group mentioned in *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, who falsely claimed to be of ʿAlī's kinship.

[13] *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 194.

[14] Ibid., p. 195.

[15] Ibid., pp. 195, 197.

***The Metals and their Human Prototypes according to* Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ**



- Vertical arrows denote *hierarchy*
- Horizontal arrows denote *likeness*
- The direction of the arrow points to the superior element

What of the right-hand elements of the three pairs? Do the hierarchical relationships between the left-hand elements translate into similar relationships between them? Here the author's aim comes to the fore, as he breaks the symmetry of the image, declaring that the 'most accursed of all' is the middle element,[16] the ʿAbbasids, the 'persons of lead'. The first element, the jurists and theologians, whom one expects to be the first (as they are related by *likeness* to gold, the superior member of the left triad), are relegated to the last role, that of the followers of the ʿAbbasids and the Umayyads. And all these people together, the author writes, were punished by metamorphosis because they called themselves 'Commander of the Believers' (*tasammaw bi-amīr al-muʾminīn*) and claimed divinity (*maʿnawiyya*). [17]

It is easy to see why the author of *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* disliked the entire edifice of state embodied by the Umayyads and later the ʿAbbasids. During the early 2nd/8th century, that is, during Umayyad rule, several Ghulat rebellions were violently crushed, which left a bitter

[16] وهم ملعنون الجميع, *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 197.
[17] Ibid., pp. 199–200.

mark on their collective memory. The Umayyads, however, were now in the past, and the most prominent place in the categorisation of evil is reserved for the ʿAbbasids, during whose reign *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* and al-Qummī's heresiography were written. After coming to power, the ʿAbbasids distanced themselves from the Shiʿis, and throughout the greater part of the next two centuries their relationship with them became strained. Several Shiʿi-coloured rebellions erupted in the territory of the caliphate, while many Shiʿis and members of the ʿAlid family were brutally persecuted.[18] This explains why the main subject of the attack in both texts (and of the Mukhammisa as described by al-Qummī) was the ʿAbbasids. The creation of a threefold hierarchy and the breaking of its (anticipated) symmetry, then, can be seen as a rhetorical device to underscore the degree of malice displayed by those whom the text attacks.

Purity of Birth, Social Boundaries and the 'World of Mixing'

The Ghulat divided the world into pairs of opposites: light-darkness, spirit/light-matter, light-fire, believers-infidels and so on. This was not a new phenomenon, and in fact can be seen as forming part of a broad pattern of dualist religious thought in the Near East, which also found expression in some of the traditions of the Imāmīs.[19] To be properly understood, however, such a classification of the universe must be studied in the historical context in which it emerged. For, apart from being a continuation of earlier trends, it reflects how the Ghulat saw themselves in relation to others.

In what follows, several sets of symbols will be analysed that were employed by Ghulat authors to set boundaries between insider and outsider, 'us' and 'them', followed by several symbols reflecting their anxieties about breaching these boundaries. The chapter will conclude with observations about the significance of these images for understanding the Ghulat's place, or their vision of their place, in the society of their time.

[18] Newman, *Formative*, pp. 5–10; Modarressi, *Tradition*, pp. 127–128; T. Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids: the First Family of Islam, 750–1200* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 4–7; Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya', p. 533.

[19] Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes on Imami *Walāya*', p. 267.

The Ghulat laid great emphasis on the distinction between insider and outsider, believer and unbeliever, and expressed it in a variety of images and symbols. The main idea behind the distinction was that believers were intrinsically good, close to God, luminous, while unbelievers were by their very nature evil, dark and material. Sometimes they are given an evil appearance because of their own transgressions, but sometimes they are said to have been made that way from the outset. A previous chapter sufficiently demonstrated this dichotomy, and here some of the images that articulate it most clearly will be discussed.

A convenient place to start is the creation myth. It is preserved in several versions, but in all of them the distinction between believers and unbelievers is established at the very dawn of creation, where the unbelievers are damned either because of their own disobedience, or simply because God chose to make them that way. Whether for their own transgressions or because of God's determination, the distinction is there to stay. For no unbeliever may transcend the damned state and become good, because his or her evil nature is unchangeable, and so God makes every effort to prevent him or her from achieving this. Consider the following passage from *Kitāb al-marātib*:[20]

> God made creatures as spiritual entities (*rūḥāniyyīn*) who neither eat nor drink, and who have luminous bodies. He appeared amongst them in their forms and shapes, displaying to them brilliant power and making them observe Him, see Him, look at Him, hear His speech, know His power, and perceive His command and prohibition. Then He called them to know His Oneness and to embrace His Lordship, giving them intellect with which to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil, obedience and defiance. Some of them responded to this and some were defiant. Those who responded did so at different times. Some responded at the beginning of the call, while some failed to do so. Some of them rejected it and became arrogant, and some became perplexed and stood still. So creation was divided into two parts – believers and infidels.

Several other texts also state that the unbelievers became such because they disobeyed God's call, while believers were blessed because they

[20] Preserved in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 230 and al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 184.

obeyed. In yet other accounts the unbelievers are created evil from the very outset. *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, *Kitāb al-haft* and *Umm al-kitāb*[21] state that the unbelievers (presented as the Demon and his progeny)[22] were made from the inadvertent disobedience (*maʿāṣī*) and errors of the believers. Because the believers' disobedience was inadvertent, they were eventually forgiven, whereas the evil nature of unbelievers was determined from the outset – they are created from disobedience, so their evil is ready made. And when, in two accounts, the Demon tries to prostrate before God to escape punishment, God blinds him to prevent him from doing so.[23] In *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, God distinguishes the blessed from the damned by placing those who are to be saved at the right-hand side of His throne, and those who are doomed at the left-hand side.[24]

Once creation has been completed, the unbelievers' vicissitudes continue to reflect their (innate or acquired) evil, which is never to change into a state of goodness, whereas the believers have the possibility of becoming increasingly better through their own efforts, and of drawing nearer to the luminous world. The correlative opposition of good–evil, believer-unbeliever, 'us'–'them' is expressed in a number of symbols, all articulated in broad cosmological terms that focus on the entire universe rather than just on human beings, and drawing on the notion that the good is spiritual and the evil material. And they all stress the unbelievers' proximity to matter and the believers' affinity to spirit.

The notion of the seven spiritual degrees is a good example. It rests on the broader arrangement of all Being in a hierarchical ladder and presided over by a most pure and abstract God, the Meaning (*al-maʿnā*). From Him it leads downwards, through various degrees of luminosity into the world of matter, which itself is divided into degrees of increasing impurity and materiality. Most eloquently, the irreversible nature of the upward movement of the believers and the downward movement of the infidels is articulated in Chapters 53 to 57

[21] *KH*, ch. 6–7, pp. 28–30**;** *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 1–15; *Umm al-kitāb*, para. 197.

[22] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* equates unbelievers with the Demon and his progeny in para. 15.

[23] Ibid., paras 11–12; Muḥammad b. Sinān, *Kitāb al-anwār*, pp. 85–86.

[24] *Kitāb al-aẓilla*, para. 10.

of *Kitāb al-haft*, by means of gender and animal imagery. Although women are ranked lower than men, a believing woman may only move upwards and can be reborn only into nobler forms, becoming a man. By the same logic, an unbelieving woman is never reborn into a male body because unbelievers never move to higher stations, whereas an infidel man may be reborn as a woman on his downward path.

Some of the *kuffār* do perform good deeds, but this exception only proves the rule, because it changes nothing in their status as evil creatures. According to *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, for example, when an unbeliever saves a believer from murder and is reborn into a new body, he will be rewarded by a sufficient boon so as to ensure he will save another believer.[25] So, even in this case, the main beneficiaries are the believers, whereas the text says nothing of the unbelievers becoming 'better', or turning into believers.[26]

A final set of symbols stressing the innate goodness of the *muʾminūn* and the evil of the *kuffār* is seen in the descriptions of their respective births – two similar yet diametrically opposed processes. Here the steps undergone by the former are described as good, pleasant, blissful, full of light and spiritual, whereas for the latter they are fearsome, unpleasant, painful, dark and impure.[27] The perceived cause of impurity is the womb, which an unbeliever's soul enters only unlawfully and a believer's soul only lawfully.[28] Throughout pregnancy unbelievers are immersed in the womb both in body and in soul.[29] In contrast to the *kuffār*, during this period the souls of the believers revel in paradise and enjoy the proximity of God, and what remains in the womb are their bodies alone:

> After it remains in its place in the womb for forty days, God takes the soul of the believer, which is dressed in one of the veils of unbelief, doubt and lie. He takes it to the nearest heaven, to Paradise, in which there is a spring called the Spring of Life; he is

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[25] Para. 16.

[26] A similar discussion is found in *KH*, ch. 50, p. 142. Here, an unbeliever who treats believers well is rewarded with bodily health and abundance in wealth. But even then he still transforms, albeit in *masūkhiyya* he fares better thanks to his good deeds.

[27] The two texts that describe this process in very similar terms are *Kitāb al-haft*, ch. 34–37, pp. 92–96, and *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, paras 56–69.

[28] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 65.

[29] Ibid., para. 67.

> [then] washed in it and is told, 'You shall not die in sub-human forms from now on.' He is then immersed in it and the veil of unbelief is washed away … The souls have a tree above that spring, with couches near its trunk; he [i.e. the believer] leans upon them, fans himself and forgets the distress that had befallen him in that world.[30]

The hierarchy is joined in *Kitāb al-haft* by the Imams who are, of course, the purest of created beings, because they are not associated with the female womb either in body or in soul – because their mothers are in reality not women but angels.[31] The author of this text thus presents a three-tiered gradation, where the unbelievers are contaminated by contact with the womb in both body and soul, the believers only in body, but the Imams in neither. (In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ* the hierarchy is only two-tiered but follows the same logic.) In one anecdote Mufaḍḍal tells the Imam not to touch him as he has been polluted through sexual contact with a woman. The Imam, however, tells him not to worry as 'a believer is never polluted'.[32]

Thus the Imams are the ideal of goodness which here is expressed by the notion that they do not associate with filth either in soul or body. The believers, who are associated with matter through their bodies, are nevertheless close to the Imams because their souls remain pure and luminous; and because the soul prevails over the body, they are pure overall. And the unbelievers are evil and impure both in body and in soul.

The contrast between believer and unbeliever in the Ghulat texts is presented as part of a broader classification of the entire universe. (The case with the hierarchy of metals, each of these reflecting a hierarchy of individuals in the actual world, is another such instance.) Behind such universal classifications, however, lies a clear attempt to classify society and to mark the boundaries of the group to which the authors (and perhaps readers) of the texts belonged.[33]

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[30] Ibid., paras 60–62.

[31] *KH*, ch. 37, p. 93.

[32] *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn*, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 118; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, pp. 194–195.

[33] On the social significance of such classifications, see B. Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*

The Birth of Imams, Believers and Unbelievers

	The Womb	
	Body	Soul
Imams	-	-
Believers	+	-
Unbelievers	+	+

Whether the stark separation of the Ghulat universe into 'us' and 'them' translated into actual purity rules and restrictions regarding physical contact with those who were not members of their group is difficult to tell. There is one text which warns against sitting with unbelievers, arguing with them, and approaching them and their mosques,[34] but whether there actually was such a restriction enacted, and if so, how widely spread it was, we do not know. It is known however, that they were not completely isolated and that they had daily interactions with others, and that some of the Imams befriended some Ghulat.

It is quite clear that the authors of the Ghulat texts discussed in this chapter viewed themselves as a separate, elite group of believers amid a sea of infidels ruled over by a demonic ʿAbbasid dynasty. To see this one need only read their honest accounts of how they positioned themselves (the 'believers') *vis-à-vis* others (the 'unbelievers'). The primordial images of the division between believers and unbelievers at the dawn of creation, the distinction between the birth of believers and unbelievers, the latter's rebirth into lowly forms, all served to add divine authority to their classification of humanity.[35]

In addition, the texts supply other indications of the Ghulat's sense of exclusivity. One sign is the near absence of references to now known Ghulat texts in external sources, which indicates that the Ghulat viewed their literature as an inner, esoteric lore, to be shared only inside the community. Another piece of evidence is the open injunctions against divulging the secrets of the community and also

(New York, 1989), pp. 131–141; cf. also B. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: the Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origins of Caste* (Oxford, 1994).

[34] *Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib*, pp. 266–267.

[35] Cf. the discussion on religious discourse in Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, p. 5.

the idea that what is permissible with one's brethren is forbidden with others nearby. In one tradition, echoed in several sources, Mufaḍḍal asks the Imam whether eating meat, having intercourse with women and drinking wine is reprehensible, to which the Imam responds: 'The eating of meat is obedience, intercourse with women is an obligation, and the drinking of the forbidden grape juice is complete bliss if done together with one's brethren; yes, what is permissible with your own is forbidden with others.'[36] This statement recalls the Imāmī understanding of *taqiyya* (i.e. prudent dissimulation of one's true beliefs when in danger), as an attempt by a smaller group to coexist with a larger one – albeit that the nature of the two groups differed, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

It seems evident that a number of people in the Ghulat community other than the authors read these texts and viewed them as authoritative. But to what degree an average Ghali shared their view of a stark separation between insider and outsider, and to what degree, or whether at all, it was acted upon, may never be known. As has been suggested by David Freidenreich and Thomas Sizgorich, social boundaries expressed in texts do not always articulate the divisions that actually operated between communities in Late Antiquity. Rather, the imaginary walls separating the Jewish and Christian communities studied by these scholars in many cases reflected the anxieties of their authors about their being breached and indicated their permeability.[37] The Ghulat authors similarly exhibit a great deal of anxiety about the 'mixing' between believers and unbelievers, which can be taken as a sign that the boundaries they sought to construct were easily trespassed. Many of them warn the reader about the confusion that can arise from the mingling that takes place in the material world, which they call 'the world of mixing' (*ʿālam al-mizāj*). Here, they point out, believer and unbeliever may sit side by side, and one may not be

[36] *Majmaʿ al-akhbār*, p. 51; for other examples, see ibid., p. 137; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 139; *al-Jawhara al-ṭālaqāniyya*, p. 399.

[37] D. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley, CA, 2011), pp. 9–10; T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009), p. 31; for relevant examples, cf. also M. Morony, 'Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq', *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient*, 17 (1974), p. 134.

distinguished from the other. Chapter 16 of *Kitāb al-haft*, for example, is entitled 'On The Mixing Between Believer and Unbeliever, and How they Became Intermixed'. It states that the mixing between believers and unbelievers is in reality 'an illusory mixing' (*imtizāj al-tashbīh*); still, it may be rather deceptive, for 'a dog may be eating next to you while you think it is human'. The author of this chapter further complains that believers and unbelievers mingle together, eat, drink, and even intermarry, giving birth to a mixed offspring.[38] In *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, when God created the physical bodies of human beings, 'the bodies of the children of believers became intermixed, and God made them into seed in the loins of unbelievers and believers, then moved the seed into wombs'.[39] There are numerous other references to the subject of mixing.[40]

How does this fit into the broader context of early Islamic history? The 2nd–3rd/8th–9th centuries constitute a period when no normative form of Islam yet existed. The germs of future developments, however, were beginning to appear, as various groups tried to stake out their communal identity through various means: ritual, sacred space, purity rules and cosmology.[41] It was then, for example, in the 2nd/8th century, that a number of early Shiʿi groups began to emerge in Iraq,

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[38] *KH*, ch. 16, p. 47.

[39] *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ*, para. 54.

[40] Cf. *KH*, ch. 10, p. 37, where after the creation, God clothes believers and unbelievers alike in similar bodies, so one may see a person and think he is human, while in reality he is 'a monkey, a pig, a dog, or a bear. Hence, a believer may not be distinguished from an unbeliever by his appearance (*ṣūra*)'; for a similar discussion, see *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 189. This 'mixing' happens at times between believers and unbelievers in their bodies, and at times on a more cosmic level, between light and darkness, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. Still, the reference to 'us' and 'them' is undeniable. For further references, see Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-akwār*, pp. 43, 186; *Kitāb al-kursī* (quoted in Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 228; Ḥasan al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 81; al-Jillī, *Ḥāwī*, p. 181); *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, pp. 109, 124, 151–152, 153, 200.

[41] N. Haider, 'Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage: Mapping Shiʿī Sectarian Identity in 2nd/8th Century Kūfa', *Islamic Law and Society*, 16 (2009), p. 174; Dakake, *Charistmatic*, pp. 157 ff.; D. Freidenreich, 'The Implications of Unbelief: Tracing the Emergence of Distinctively Shiʿi Notions Regarding the Food and Impurity of Non-Muslims', *Islamic Law and Society*, 18 (2011), pp. 53–84; idem, *Foreigners*; L. Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York, 2007), pp. 3–4.

marking their membership by special rituals and by praying in communal mosques.[42] In this context, the Ghulat's metaphorical interpretation of Islamic rituals such as prayer and fasting could be viewed as just another marker of communal identity; while their exclusivist cosmology – with a stark distinction between 'us' and 'them' – demonstrates an attempt on the part of an emerging Islamic group at marking the boundary between itself and the rest of the world.

[42] Haider, 'Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage', pp. 62, 68.

Appendix: Ghulat Works Surviving in Fragments

al-Nakhaʿī, Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar. *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* in:
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 197–198, 200
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 23, 40, 53, 135, 138, 141, 165, 167–168, 169–170
- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī b. Ḥamza. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, p. 258

al-Nakhaʿī, Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar. *Bāṭin al-taklīf* in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 36–37, 49, 112, 113–114, 172, 174–175

al-Nakhaʿī, Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar. *Kitāb al-ṣalāt* in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 113–114

al-Nakhaʿī, Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Aḥmar. *Kitāb al-tanbīh* in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 45–46
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 211
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, p. 203

Muḥammad b. Sinān. *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* in:
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 210
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 167–170, 175, 203
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 25–29, 45, 53–54, 62–63
- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAbd Allāh. *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, pp. 198–202

Muḥammad b. Sinān
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-akwār*, p. 75

Kitāb al-aẓilla
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 210
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 207–209
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 41, 45, 71–74, 168, 173

Kitāb al-marātib wa'l-daraj in:
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 216–220, 230–234
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 184–190
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 82–83, 101, 118

- al-Ḥarrānī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh. *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, pp. 290–291
- al-Numayrī, al-ʿAbdī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. *al-Risāla al-ḥarrāniyya*, pp. 306–307

Risālat al-tawḥīd in:
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 209, 225–230
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, p. 202
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 44–45, 77–87

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Aqrab al-asānīd* in:
- al-Junbulānī. *Īdāḥ al-miṣbāḥ*, p. 272

Kitāb al-ẓuhūrāt in:
- al-Khaṣībī. *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, p. 39
- al-Ḥarrānī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh. *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, p. 292
- al-Ṭabarānī. *al-Jawhariyya*, p. 37

Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-murtadd in:
- al-Khaṣībī. *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya*, p. 59

Kitāb maʿrifat al-bārī in:
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, p. 170
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 29, 54

Kitāb al-muqniʿ in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī b. Ḥamza. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, p. 277

Kitāb al-kursī in:
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, pp. 227–229
- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 181–182
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 80–81
- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, p. 273

Kitāb Amīr al-muʿminīn in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 123

Kitāb al-murshid in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 145

Kitāb al-anwār in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 144

Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, p. 174
- Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mithāl*, p. 216

Kitāb al-ibtidāʾ in:
- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, pp. 270–271

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *al-Kāfī liʾl-ḍidd al-munāfī* in:

- al-Ṭabarānī. *al-Ḥāwī*, pp. 53, 105, 108–115

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. *Kitāb al-mawārid* in:

- al-Ṭabarānī. *al-Ḥāwī*, pp. 49, 53

Kitāb al-dastūr in:

- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 46–47, 55

Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mihrān. *Kitāb al-maḥmūdīn wa'l-madhmūmīn* in:[1]

- al-Jillī. *Ḥāwī*, pp. 194–195, 198
- al-Ḥarrānī, Ḥasan. *Ḥaqāʾiq*, pp. 118, 165

Kitāb al-sabʿīn in:

- al-Ḥarrānī, ʿAlī. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif*, pp. 279–280
- al-Ṭabarānī. *al-Ḥāwī*, p. 65
- *Kitāb majmaʿ al-akhbār*, pp. 87, 88

[1] Mentioned in al-Najāshī's *Rijāl* (p. 334) as *Kitāb al-mamdūḥīn wa'l-madhmūmīn*.

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